

Rabbi Lewis' Message for March, 2010

My Dad always thought that his legal name was Edward Israel Lewis. He found out otherwise when he had to provide his birth certificate when he went into the army. His legal name was Israel Edward Lewis. Since there was already an Uncle Izzy in the family, everyone called my Dad Eddie. He legally changed his name to what he had always thought it was.

Israel was a good name for my father. He was so proud to be a member of the Jewish people. When my parents moved to Westfield in 1954 and joined the temple, they were one of about seventy families. Those families were like my own family. Seeing them this week at the funeral and during shivah was like having a family reunion.

At various times, my Dad directed traffic on Sunday mornings at the temple (the Westfield temple had no parking lot until quite recently), chaired the Rabbi's House Committee (in the days when the synagogue provided a parsonage for the rabbi), was president of the Men's Club and sat on the Temple Board. Many times during dinner, the phone rang and he was called out to make a minyan at the house of a mourner. He and my mother went to services every week. I learned the words to the kaddish by standing at my Dad's side during services and listening to him recite those words for his parents.

And now I say those words in his memory. As I write, we have just gotten up from sitting shivah. Mourning only begins with shivah; it continues through shloshim, a month-long period that includes the shivah. Full mourning concludes at the end of eleven months.

Some of you have asked me about the shloshim. The shloshim is the thirty day period that follows the burial. It is a time in which mourners return to work but still minimize celebration. For instance, I can be part of the Megillah reading but won't attend the Purim carnival. Men often don't shave or get haircuts during this thirty day period. Two ways to mark the shloshim include giving tzedakah and studying Torah as a tribute to the deceased.

I would like the congregation to join me when I observe the shloshim of my father's death. It falls on the weekend when we will celebrate Shabbat Across America, We will find some time to study Torah together – and have some good desserts in his honor.

My family and I am grateful for all of your visits, notes, cookies and love.

Rabbi Ellen J. Lewis