

CHAPTER 6: The Qeri'a

One of the first steps of the Jewish mourning is the Qeri'a, the tearing of the clothes. This is the most eloquent and original expression of Jewish mourning, as it is narrated in the Bible in regards to Jacob, King David and Job. The Qeri'a, the tearing of a cloth that one is wearing, is a controlled form of emotional discharge. It produces an effect of psychological relief as it expresses the great anguish suffered by the mourners..

The Rabbi or the officiant performs a small cut on the shirt of the Abel. The Abel, who must be standing, holds the small cut and pronounces the following Berakha:

BARUKH ATA ADONAI ELOHENU MELEKH HAOLAM DAYAN HAEMET
Blessed are you, Almighty, our God, King of the world, the Judge of truth

Next, the *Abel* with his or her own hands pulls the cut downwards for a few inches as instructed by the ceremony officiant.

The family members who perform the *qeri'a* are seven: father, mother, son, daughter, brother, sister, spouse.

The *qeri'a* should be done in one's shirt. In our community most people accept this rule but some families have requested to have their undershirt cut instead. The Religious Council of our community recommended that the officiant would suggest to those families, at least for mother and father, to cut the shirt. In any case, if they still refuse, we obviously do not force them, we do the *qeri'a* in the undershirt and we allow them to recite the beracha *dayan haEmet* as well.

The *qeri'a* should be done on the left side of the mourner, next to the heart, for his or her father or mother. Additionally, in case of father or mother, the cut from the shirt's border should be detached (*Kame Safa*).

For all other relatives (sibling, spouse or children) the *qeri'a* should be done on the right side of the mourner.

Women have the same obligation as man in performing the qeri'a. To make the cut, however, they should be assisted by another woman, and for reasons of modesty, the cut is kept covered, not very visible.

As it will be explained later one, the torn clothes must be used during the first seven days of mourning (Shib'a).