The Qeri’a

One of the first steps of 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 regarding 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 their shirt of the Abel. The Abel, who must be standing, holds the small cut and pronounces the following Berakha:

BARUKH ATA ADO-NAI ELO-HENU 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, and 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 cut the undershirt instead. For mother and father, one should be more strict and tear the shirt (in any case, if someone refuses to cut the shirt, we still do the *qeri’a* in the undershirt and allow the mourner to recite the berakha 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.

The initial cut should be done from the collar.

Additionally, in the case of the father or mother, the cut from the shirt’s border should be detached (Kame Safa).

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

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

The torn clothes must be used during the first seven days of mourning (Shib’a).

If the burial takes place in Chol haMoed, the intermediate days between Yom Tob during Pesach or Sukkot, only the children of the deceased should do the qeriy’a. The other family members, like siblings, would do the qeriya once the Holiday ends.