



Repairing the Fabric

One of the traditional Jewish acts of mourning is the tearing of our clothes -- the performance of what is called *kri'a* -- literally tear in Hebrew. By ripping the fabric of a lapel, a pocket, a sleeve, or a black ribbon opposite our hearts, we acknowledge through a physical act of tearing, the emotional and psychic sundering death brings.

In response to the loss, fury and sorrow we experience as we process grief -- in response to what our President has called our "quiet, unyielding anger" at the upending of our world, Jewish Tradition decrees we rend the fabric of our garments, that we might thereby be returned in some small measure to wholeness.

But what shall we do when it is the fabric of our society and world that is rent? What shall we do when it is the rending that is the cause of and not the response to our grief? What shall we do then? How shall we react when the way we understood the world and our place within it is today rendered unrecognizable and we cannot go back to the way it ever was? What do we tear then? And how do we begin to make our world whole again?

Perhaps an answer can be found in the story of the young student who found a large map of the world in the newspaper. Curious, the student took the map to his teacher. Seeing an opportunity to challenge the student, the teacher took the map of the globe and tore it into many, many pieces. Fragments of paper fell to the floor at the student's feet. And then handing over a roll of tape, the teacher challenged the student to reassemble the map of the world, and then the teacher returned to work.

The student dropped to the floor and, in short order, completed the assignment by correctly taping together each of the pieces of the whole of the world. Where only minutes before the image of the world we believed we had known so well was torn asunder, and strewn across the floor, now it was being offered up as an intact whole.

When the teacher asked the student how it had been possible to reassemble the fragmented world so quickly, the response was short and to the point: "There was a picture of a person on the back side. I repaired that one person and the whole world got fixed too."

-Rabbi Aaron Benjamin Bisno