

SUFFERING MEMORY



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Suffering Memory Where It Breaks Through

וְכָל אָדָם הוּא סָכָר בֵּין עֶבֶר לְעֵתִיד.
 כִּשֶׁהוּא מֵת נִשְׁבֵּר הַסָּכָר וְהָעֶבֶר מִתְפָּרֵץ לְתוֹךְ הָעֵתִיד
 וְאִין מִקָּדָם וְאִין מֵאַחֵר. וְהַזְמַן הוּא אֶחָד
 כְּמוֹ אֱלֹהֵינוּ, זְמַנּוֹ אֶחָד.
 וְזָכַר הַסָּכָר לְבִרְכָה.

And every person is a dam between past and future.
 When he dies the dam is broken and the past breaks through into the future
 And there is no early or late. Time is one
 Like our God, our time is one.
 And the memory of the dam is a blessing.

Yehuda Amichai/ Sager

A Blessing For Bad News: The Dignity of Response

עַל הַגְּשָׁמִים וְעַל הַבְּשׂוֹרוֹת הַטּוֹבוֹת אוֹמְרִים: "בְּרוּךְ הַטּוֹב וְהַמְטִיב." וְעַל
 שְׂמוּעוֹת רָעוֹת אוֹמְרִים: "בְּרוּךְ דִּין הָאֱמֶת."

For the rains and for good news one says: "Blessed is the One who is good and who makes for the good." And for bad news one says: "Blessed is the Judge of Truth." (Mishnah Berachot 9:2)

חַיֵּב אָדָם לְבָרֵךְ עַל הַרְעָה כְּשֶׁמִּשְׁמֵהוּ מְבָרֵךְ עַל הַטּוֹבָה, שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר: "וְאָהַבְתָּ
 אֶת ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ בְּכָל לִבְבְּךָ וּבְכָל נַפְשְׁךָ וּבְכָל מְאֹדְךָ" (דְּבָרִים ו:ה). "בְּכָל
 לִבְבְּךָ" - בְּשֵׁנֵי יִצְרִיךָ, בְּיִצְרֵךָ טוֹב, וּבְיִצְרֵךָ רָע; "וּבְכָל נַפְשְׁךָ" - אֶפִּילוֹ הוּא נוֹטֵל
 אֶת נַפְשְׁךָ; "וּבְכָל מְאֹדְךָ" - בְּכָל מִדָּה וּמִדָּה שֶׁהוּא מוֹדֵד לָךְ הוּי מוֹדֵה לוֹ
 בְּמֵאֵד מְאֹד.

A person is obliged to bless the bad just the same as the good, as the Torah says: *You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your might* (Deuteronomy 6:5). *With all your heart*- with both of your creative impulses, the impulse for good, and the impulse for bad; *with all your soul*- even if he takes your soul; and *with all your might*- for all mite-sized measures meted, magnify mightily. (Mishnah Berachot 9:5)

An Orphan Woman's Kaddish

וְיִתְגַּדֵּל וְיִתְקַדָּשׁ	לֹא תִהְיֶה מְנוּחָתְךָ וְלֹא יֵצְאוּ לִי בְּנִים מִזֶּרְעֶךָ לֹא אֶצְדִּיק אֶת הַדִּין וְאֶמַּר וְאֶמַּר וְאֶמַּר וְאֶמַּר יִתְבָּרַךְ
וְיִשְׁתַּבַּח וְיִתְפָּאֵר	וְיִתְגַּדֵּל וְיִתְקַדָּשׁ שְׁמֵהּ רַבָּא בְּעֵלְמָא דִּי בְּרָא כְּרַעוּתָהּ וְרִצּוֹנֶיהָ כּוֹאֵב וּמְכַאֵיב וּמִטִּיל צֶלַע
וְיִתְרוֹמַם	וְגַם אֹר וְאָנוּ רוֹקְדִים עַל הַקֶּצֶה בְּקָצֵב כְּפּוֹל צְעָדִים בֵּין הָאֹר הַשׁוֹרֵף לְצֶל הָרוּט
וְיִתְנַשֵּׂא	נִעְנִים בְּתַנּוּעָה לְמוֹשֶׁךְ בְּחוּטִים יְהֵא שְׁמֵהּ רַבָּא מְבָרַךְ לְעוֹלָם וּלְעָלְמֵי עָלְמֵינָא
וְיִתְהַדָּר וְיִתְעַלֶּה	הִנֵּה גַם אֲנִי מְכַנְיָסָה רֹאשׁ וּפָנִים לְמָקוֹם בּוֹ בְּקִשְׁתָּ "אָמֵן" וְ"אָמֵן" כְּמוֹ לְפָנִים
וְיִתְהַלָּל	שְׁיִמְשֶׁךְ וְיִזְלִיךְ וְיִזְבִּיל וְיִסְחַב וְיִטְלִיל נְשָׁמָת
הַלְלוּיָהּ	עַל אוֹתוֹ סֶלֶם שְׂאִין לוֹ קֶץ יְבִיאֵנִי אֵלֶיךָ וְיַעֲשֶׂה לִּי דְמוּתְךָ

יְרֵאָה עֲנִי וְיִשְׁמַע רִיבִי וְיַעֲשֶׂה לְךָ שְׁלוֹם בְּמִרוֹמָיִם
לְעֵלְמָא וּלְעֵלְמָא מִן כָּל שִׁירְתָּא שְׂיַדְעֵתִי

Magnified and sanctified	This will not be your rest and no children will come to me from your seed I will not justify the verdict and say, and say, and say, may He be blessed magnified and sanctified be the great name in the world that He created
And praised and extolled	according to his will while my will is sore and painful casting shadow and light and we dance on the edge in
And exalted	double-time rhythm between the burning light and the quivering shadow moving to the movement of He who pulls the strings
And elevated	may His great Name be blessed for ever and ever here I also stick my head and face
And glorified and august	into the place where you pleaded "amen" and "amen" as before
And praised	that He might pull and lead, and haul, and drag, and conduct my soul up that ladder that has no end
Halleluyah	and bring me to you so that He can make me your likeness

Let Him see my suffering and hear my plea and make peace for you in the heights
Above and beyond any poem that I know

Hava Pinhas-Cohen/Sager

Kaddish

Look around us, search above us, below, behind.
 We stand in a great web of being joined together.
 Let us praise, let us love the life we are lent
 passing through us is the body of Israel
 and our own bodies, let's say amen.

Time flows through us like water.
 The past and the dead speak through us.
 We breathe out our children's children, blessing.

Blessed is the earth from which we grow,
 blessed the life we are lent,
 blessed the ones who teach us,
 blessed the ones we teach,
 blessed is the word that cannot say the glory
 that shines through us and remains to shine
 flowing past distant suns on the way to forever.
 Let's say amen.

Blessed is light, blessed is darkness,
 but blessed above all else is peace
 which bears the fruits of knowledge
 on strong branches, let's say amen.

Peace that bears joy into the world,
 peace that enables love, peace over Israel
 everywhere, blessed and holy is peace, let's say amen.

Marge Piercy

Shiva: Seven Days of Re-Creation?

"אל תבכו למית ואל תגדו לו" (ירמיהו כב: י). "אל תבכו למית" – יותר מדאי ואל תגדו לו" – יותר מפשיעור. הא כיצד? שלשה ימים לבכי, ושבעה להספד, ושלישים לגיהוץ ולתספורת. מפאן ואילך אמר הקדוש ברוך הוא: אי אתם רחמנים בו יותר ממני.

Do not weep for the dead, and do not lament for him (Jeremiah 22:10). Do not weep for the dead. Do not weep overmuch, and do not lament for him—certainly not more than the prescribed measure. How is this? Three days for weeping, seven for public mourning, thirty for dressing and grooming. After that, the Holy One, blessed be he, says: You should not be more compassionate than I am. (Babylonian Talmud Moed Katan 27b)

"ויגעש לאביו אבל שבעת ימים" (בראשית נ: י). ומנין לאבל שהוא שבעה? רבי אבא מיתי לה מהכא: "ויגעש לאביו אבל שבעת ימים." ולמדיו דבר קדם מתן תורה? ריש לקיש בשם בר קפרא מיתי לה מהכא: "וימפתח אהל מועד לא תצאו שבעת ימים" (ויקרא ח: לג). מה אתם נמשחתם בשמן המשחה שבעה ימים, אף אתם שמרו לאחיכם שבעה ימים. רבי הושעיה מיתי לה מהכא: "ויפתח אהל מועד תשבו יומם ולילה שבעת ימים ושמרתם את משמרת ה'" (ויקרא ח: לה). מה הקדוש ברוך הוא שמר לעולמו שבעה ימים, אף אתם שמרו לאחיכם שבעה ימים. דאמר רבי יהושע בן לוי: שבעה ימים נתאבל הקדוש ברוך הוא על עולמו. רבי יוחנן מיתי לה מהכא: אל נא תהי כמות" (במדבר יב: יב). אלא: "תסגר שבעת ימים" (במדבר יב: יד). מה ימי הסגר שבעה אף ימי אבל שבעה.

He made for his father a mourning of seven days (Genesis 50:10). What is the source for mourning being seven days? Rabbi Abba derived it from here: *He made for his father a mourning of seven days.* But do we learn authoritative teaching prior to the giving of the Torah? Resh Lakish in the name of bar Kappara derived it from here: *And from the opening of the tent of meeting you shall not exit for seven days.* (Leviticus 8:33). Just as you, the priests, were anointed with anointing oil for seven days, so shall you attend to your fellows for seven days. Rabbi Hoshayah derived it from here: *Sit at the entrance to the tent of meeting day and night for seven days and keep the Lord's watch* (Leviticus 8:35). Just as the Holy One blessed be he preserved his world for seven days [before bringing the flood] just so, you shall guard your brethren for seven days, as Rabbi Joshua ben Levi said: Seven days the Holy One blessed be he mourned over his world [that he was about to destroy with the flood]. Rabbi Yohanan derived it from here: *Let [Miriam] not be as one dead [because of her leprosy]* (Numbers 12:12). Rather, she should be quarantined seven days. As the days of quarantine are seven, so are the days of mourning. (Genesis Rabbah 100:7)

Scripts For Suffering Loss And Bearing Recovery

Ancient stories of tearing in grief—for example, Jacob tearing for his son, Joseph; David for his friend, Jonathan; Elisha for his teacher, Elijah—distil into later day rituals of tearing; mere traces of story remain. While rituals lose intimate contact with the stories that founded them, they establish precedent and gain power in the gathering motion of generations. We don't recall the ancient stories, but we remember the mourning of our parents and grandparents; we tear the way that they tore—a garment, a ribbon, a scarf, a tie—and we recite a blessing over a sad reality. The rituals carry us off, sometimes against our wills as angry and defiant prisoners, sometimes with gratitude, as needy and trusting children.

There are many components to rituals of tearing, all tuned to the emotional pitches of various kinds of loss: a parent, a relation, a stranger, a dignitary, a large population, or even a Torah scroll among other sacred community institutions. Each ritual nuance is drawn from one biblical story or another about tearing in grief. The traditions become a vast and intricate fabric, the finely woven and stitched elements constructing an artwork of mindful living in the presence of loss: How much tearing is enough? For whom, and in whose company, do we tear? Is tearing in grief a solitary, or a communal act? Who is responsible for tearing? How long must we wear our mourning? When, and how, can we mend what has been rent?

There is a time to tear and a time to mend said Ecclesiastes (3:7). The *time to tear* is well narrated in sacred stories; there are no stories of *a time to mend*. It is understandable that an explosive, anguished response to loss has the narrative appeal of an impactful moment when everything changed at once. Mending is less pointed. There are no biblical stories portraying the moment of mending—neither the mending of a garment nor of a life. There is only the narrative evidence that torn and grief-struck biblical ancestors mended their lives, restoring function.

Freedom from biblical guidance clears the way for intuitive ritual responses to mending that testify to deep and enduring emotional wisdom and compassion for the mourner and for the community. Unaccompanied by the recitation of a blessing or a biblical verse, the many traditions of mending stitch fabrics of recovery, return, and renewal as they address the abiding concerns of mortality, love, coherence, and community.

The following examples of tearing and of mending come from *Hilchot Evel, Laws of Mourning*, part of Maimonides' great code of Jewish law, *The Mishneh Torah*, written in Egypt between 1170-1180. I have supplied brief narrative overviews of significant relevant sections of Maimonides' work.



Tearing must be a substantial act, a commitment to the moment of loss. Grasp a handful of garment and tear across the stitching; it must be an honest, muscular tearing. Stand up when you tear, and tear when the moment is most hot. Herein lies the dignity of responding to loss. Wear the tear in front for all to see. Tear in public for parents, for teachers, and for all losses mourned by the community.

אָבֵל חַיֵּב לְקַרֵּעַ עַל מֵתוֹ. וְאִין קְרִיעָה אֶלָּא מֵעַמֵּד. שְׁנֵאמַר: "וַיִּקֶם הַמֶּלֶךְ וַיִּקְרַע אֶת בְּגָדָיו" (שְׁמוּאֵל ב' יג: לא).

A mourner is obliged to tear on account of his dead. And tearing must be done while standing. As it is said: [after the death of Absalom] *the king rose and tore his garments* (2 Samuel 13:31). (Maimonides, Hilchot Evel 8:1)

כָּל שִׁבְעַת יָמֵי אֲבֵלוּת הַקְּרֵעַ לְפָנִים. וְאִם בָּא לְהַחֲלִיף- מִחֲלִיף. וְאִינוּ קוֹרֵעַ קְרֵעַ אַחֵר; שֶׁכָּל קְרֵעַ שְׂאִינוּ בְּשַׁעַת חֲמוּם- אִינוּ קְרֵעַ. בְּמָה דְּבָרִים אֲמוּרִים. בְּשָׂאָר הַיָּמִים חוּץ מֵאֲבִיו וְאִמוֹ. אָבֵל עַל אָבִיו וְעַל אִמוֹ קוֹרֵעַ עַד שֶׁמִּגֵּלָה אֶת לְבוֹ. וּמִבְּדִיל שְׁפַת הַבְּגָד. וְאִינוּ קוֹרֵעַ בְּכָלִי אֶלָּא בְּיָדוֹ. מִבַּחוּץ, בְּפָנֵי כָּל הָעָם.

For the whole seven days of mourning, the tear is in front. If he desires to change his garments, he may do so. He is not required to tear the second garment; for any tear not made at the time of heated emotion is not a tear. Of what do these rules speak? They speak of a death other than a father or mother. In the case of one's father or mother, one rips a rip long enough to expose one's heart. He must rip apart the border of the garment; he may not tear it with a utensil and he must tear it outside, in the presence of community. (Hilchot Evel 8:3)



Tearing exposes the weave of community. A young child has no legal obligation to tear, but tearing a child's garment fulfills an emotional duty to a healthy, supple community. For the desperately sick, there is no tearing—or even informing of a death—so that the frail person's soul not be ripped.

קוֹרֵעִין לְקַטֹּן מִפְּנֵי עֲגִמַת נַפְשׁ. וְחוּלָה שְׂמַת לוֹ מֵת- אִין מְקַרְעִין לוֹ וְלֹא מוֹדִיעִין לוֹ שְׁלֹא תִטְרַף עָלָיו דְּעֵתוֹ...

We tear a child's garment to create an atmosphere of sorrow. For a sick person who has suffered a death, we do not tear for him, nor do we inform him so that his soul not be ripped up. (Hilchot Evel 8:4)

An additional commentary: My sister's funeral was organized quickly as is the custom in Jerusalem. She died around 6 AM on a Monday; the funeral took place at 1 PM. As shiva began back in the house, my 8-year-old niece slipped away to the bedroom and changed from the dress she wore to the funeral into more comfortable clothes. She then took the dress and tore, tore, and tore it again until that dress was reduced to shreds; tearing for her mother who had been torn from her; tearing for the deep sense of abandonment; tearing out of pain that was not ready for comfort; tearing to out of anger – at God, the world, her mother, all adults who could not provide her with safety or satisfy her confusion. Her tearing was not a ritual, it was everything. (Rabbi Dan Alexander, Charlottesville, VA)



The community enables and honors tearing: If a traveling cloak is loaned with full knowledge of impending loss at journey's end, then that garment can be torn, repaired, and returned. Tears for a mother and father that must not be fully repaired must remain torn from one owner to the next. The seller is obliged to tell the purchaser of tears for lost parents or for the ruins of a community. Compassion is sewn into the marketplace when the purchasing community cares and curates, preserving the jagged scars—a record of grief preserved beyond the grieving.

הַאֲמִיר לְחֵבְרוֹ : הַשְּׂאִילְנִי חִלּוּקָךְ וְאַבְקָר אֶת אָבִי שֶׁהוּא חוֹלָה, וְהִלְךְ וּמָצְאוּ שְׁמֵת-קוֹרֵעַ וּמְאַחָה, וּמְחִזִּיר לוֹ אֶת חִלּוּקוֹ, וְנוֹתֵן לוֹ דְּמֵי קָרְעוֹ. וְאִם לֹא הוֹדִיעוּ שֶׁהוּא מְבַקֵּר לוֹ חוֹלָה-הָרִי זֶה לֹא יִגַע בּוֹ.

When one tells a friend: Lend me your cloak so that I can visit my father who is critically ill—if, when he visits, he finds that his father has died, he should tear the cloak, mend it, and return it, reimbursing the owner for the tear. If he does not inform the owner that he is visiting a critically ill person, he should not damage the cloak. (Hilchot Evel 8:7)

כָּל הַקָּרְעִים שֶׁקוֹרֵעַ אָדָם עַל שְׂאֵר קְרוֹבָיו- שׁוֹלֵל הַקָּרֵעַ לְאַחַר שְׁבַעֵה וּמְאַחָה לְאַחַר שְׁלֹשִׁים. עַל אָבִיו וְעַל אִמּוֹ- שׁוֹלֵל לְאַחַר שְׁלֹשִׁים וְאִינוּ מְאַחָה לְעוֹלָם. וְהָאִשָּׁה קוֹרֵעַת וְשׁוֹלֵלַת מִיָּד, אֶפְּלוּ עַל אָבִיהָ וְעַל אִמָּהּ, מִפְּנֵי הַצְּנִיעוּת.

Any tear that a person makes over a relative other than parents can be basted after seven days and repaired after thirty days. For one's father and mother, one can baste after thirty days but never repair. A woman who tears bastes immediately, even for her father and her mother, because of modesty. (Hilchot Evel 9:1)

וּכְשֶׁם שֶׁהַמוֹכֵר אָסוּר לְאַחֲזוֹתוֹ, כֵּן הַלּוֹקֵחַ. לְפִיכָךְ, הַמוֹכֵר צָרִיךְ לְהוֹדִיעַ לַלּוֹקֵחַ שֶׁקָּרַע זֶה אִינוּ מְתַקְּנָהּ.

Just as the seller may not repair it, so the purchaser may not repair it. Therefore, the seller is obliged to inform the purchaser that this tear may not be repaired. (Hilchot Evel 9:4)

Mourner's Kaddish

Yit-gadal v'yit-kadash

sh'mey rabba

b'almah di v'ra khir'utey

v'yam-likh mal-khutey

b'chayey-khon u-v'yomey-khon

u-v'chayey d'khol beyt Yisrael

ba'agalah u-viz'man kareev

v'imru amen.

יִתְגַּדֵּל וְיִתְקַדֵּשׁ

שְׁמֵהּ רַבָּא

בְּעֵלְמָא דִּי בְּרָא כְּרַעוּתֵיהּ

וְיִמְלִיךְ מַלְכוּתֵיהּ

בְּחַיֵּינוּ וּבְיוֹמֵינוּ

וּבְחַיֵּי דְכָל בֵּית יִשְׂרָאֵל

בְּעֵלְמָא וּבְזִמְן קָרִיב

וְאָמְרוּ אָמֵן.

May it be magnified, may it be sanctified
the great name

in the world created according to his will
and may his kingdom rule

in your lives and in your days

and in the lives of all the house of Israel

Quickly and in a time close at hand

and we say, amen.

Y'hey sh'mei rabba m'varakh

l'alam u-l'almey almayah.

Yit-barakh v'yishtabach v'yit-pa'ar

v'yit-romam v'yit-nasey v'yit-hadar

v'yit-aleh v'yit-halal

Sh'mey d'kud-sha b'rikh hu.

L'ey-la min kol bir'khata v'shirata

tush-b'chata v'ne-chemata

da-amiran b'almah

v'imru amen.

יְהִי שְׁמֵהּ רַבָּא מְבָרָךְ

לְעָלָם וּלְעָלְמֵי עָלְמֵינָא.

יִתְבָּרַךְ וְיִשְׁתַּבַּח וְיִתְפָּאֵר

וְיִתְרֻמַּם וְיִתְנַשֵּׂא וְיִתְהַדָּר

וְיִתְעַלֶּה וְיִתְהַלָּל

שְׁמֵהּ דְקֻדְשָׁא בְרִיךְ הוּא

לְעֵלְמָא מִן כָּל בְּרַכְתָּא וְשִׁירָתָא

תּוֹשַׁבְחָתָא וְנַחֲמָתָא

דְאָמְרוּ בְּעֵלְמָא

וְאָמְרוּ אָמֵן.

May the great name be blessed

Forever and forever.

Let it be blessed, be acclaimed, be glorified

be extolled, be elevated, be beautified

be raised and be praised

the name of the Holy One, who is blessed

beyond all blessings and songs

acclamations and consolations

spoken in the world

and we say, amen.

Y'hey shelah-ma rabbah

min shemayah

v'chayyim aleynu

v'al kol yisrael

v'imru amen.

יְהִי שְׁלָמָא רַבָּא

מִן שְׁמַיָּא

וְחַיִּים עָלֵינוּ

וְעַל כָּל יִשְׂרָאֵל

וְאָמְרוּ אָמֵן.

May there be abundant peace

from the heavens

and life for us

and for all Israel

and we say, amen.

Oseh shalom bim-romav

hu ya'aseh shalom aleynu

v'al kol Yisrael

v'imru amen.

עוֹשֵׂה שְׁלוֹם בְּמִרוֹמָיו

הוּא יַעֲשֶׂה שְׁלוֹם עָלֵינוּ

וְעַל כָּל יִשְׂרָאֵל

וְאָמְרוּ אָמֵן.

May the one who makes peace in his heights

Make peace for us

And for all Israel

And we say, amen.

Translated/transliterated by Rabbi Steven Sager