

"You shall not make a cut in your flesh for the dead." (19:28)

The word "*seret*" refers to any kind of wound, even a graze or a scratch, inflicted either by hand or by means of an instrument. This wounding is prohibited only if it is performed as a reaction to a death, but not if it is performed due to any other type of loss. This law is derived from its consistent connection with the word "*nefesh*" - soul. The law does not merely restrict the expression of the loss which we feel when we wound or inflict pain upon ourselves. This prohibition concerns not only the act of tearing or wounding the skin, but it also prohibits the existence of the *cut in the flesh* the wounding creates.

This forbidden "tearing of the flesh" has a meaning similar to the symbolism of the prescribed tearing one's garment for the dead. The rent in our garments at the time of mourning expresses our acknowledgement that the departure of the deceased has created a parallel "rent" in our personal surroundings, in the intimate world of the survivors. Accordingly, a cut into our flesh expresses the idea that the death of a relative has caused a physical change in our own bodily functioning. This concept is totally antithetical to *Torah* philosophy. Although the loss of a loved one may change the structure of our inner world, our inherent worth is not devalued with the death of any other human being.

Each individual has his own significance in the eyes of Hashem. Every fiber of our physical existence belongs to Him, combined with every spark of individuality with which He has endowed us. As long as we merit this precious G-d-given gift of life, we are enjoined to hold on to it, serving Him with all our might. Thus, the return of the soul of a loved one to Hashem should motivate us to increase our efforts to fill the gap in Hashem's service, that the death has created. This rededication to service of Hashem serves as an everlasting memorial to the dear one who has departed.