

# TEARS FOR TORAH

*by Rabbi Daniel Travis*

Rav Naftali Tzvi Yehuda Berlin known as the Netziv was renowned for his tremendous diligence in Torah learning. At a young age, he took upon himself to learn twelve hours a day every single day of the year. Day in and day out, he was always studying Torah with passion and fervor. One year, shortly after the Yom Kippur services had concluded, his father-in-law and a few other Torah scholars were walking home. They heard the sweet sounds of Torah learning and went to see who could be studying so soon after the fast's conclusion. The Netziv's father-in-law smiled when they peered into the room and saw the Netziv already deeply engrossed in his learning.

Although the Netziv literally invested his whole life in his studies, he still attributed his success in becoming one of the greatest Torah scholars and leaders of his generation to his prayers. With the exception of Rosh Hashana, when some say that crying is forbidden, his tears would flow freely every day, twice a day, when he said the blessing of "Ahava Rabba" ("abundant love") before Shema. He testified that on a day when he did not cry during this prayer, he did not have insights in his Torah learning (heard from Rav Shlomo Brevda).

The story is told of a student who visited Volozhin, where the Netziv was Rosh Yeshiva. Towards evening, the visitor prepared to leave but his host urged him to stay until the next day for the morning services. He told him that just seeing the way that the Netziv recited the prayer of Ahava Rabba would change his entire life (heard from Rav Don Segal).

Why is it that the Netziv and other Torah giants placed such emphasis on Ahava Rabba, and attributed their success in life to reciting this prayer with intense emotion? The answer clearly lies beyond its movingly poetic composition. Rather, Hashem's deep love for the Jewish people is expressed in this blessing a number of times. By examining these expressions we come to a deeper understanding of Hashem's great love for us and form a deeper, more passionate relationship with Him and His Torah.

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