

AND NEITHER WOULD WE!

by Rabbi Label Lam

The Egyptians mistreated us and afflicted us, and placed hard work upon us. And we cried out to Hashem, The G-d of our fathers, and Hashem heard our voice and saw our affliction, our travail and our oppression. (Devarim 26:6-7)

In the brief review of the account of our entry into and exit from exile in Egypt we must assume that each word that survives the editorial knife and lives to tell the story is precious. If even one word would be removed, then the irreducible complexity of the text would be at risk of hemorrhaging its deeper meaning. With that as a premise, every word must have a justified existence, and hence an important part of the story to tell.

A young man came running into the synagogue crying and picked up a Sefer Tehillim (A Book of Psalms) and started reciting passionately for a while. A man standing near by asked the fellow what had been the emergency that delivered him to the sudden moment of prayer. The young man answered that he had been in great pain about some personal issue and it had brought him to tears. He found himself crying. In the midst of the episode he realized something important.

How often do we pray without being personally engaged, without feelings!? Even if we try with all our heart, too often it doesn't happen. "Now," he said, "that the wellsprings of deep personal emotions were producing genuine tears, I decided to hurry myself to a prayer book so that the opportunity should not go to waste."

Our Sages tell us that the gates of tears are never locked. In another place, though, we are told that tears are compared to a number of things, for example "to smoke" and "to seeds". What's the difference? Tears that are compared to smoke dissipate and are lost shortly after the emotions have subsided. Tears that are like seeds, contrastingly, fall to the ground and produce everlasting results. How, though, do we turn smoke into seeds? Easy? Not so easy!

A close friend told me that while he was standing in shul with the rest of the congregation in what was to be the quiet and meditative portion of the prayer service, his little son entered, and started to pull desperately at his tallis-prayer shawl. He shouted persistently again and again, "Abba! Abba!" Some of the understandably distracted folks started to utter desperately the provocative two-letter, all useful, non-speech, rhetorical question, "Nu! Nu!"

My friend told me that at that moment when he was frozen in his place supposedly deep in prayer he managed without words to pantomime to the assembled and the annoyed a vital point. This little

boy is crying out to his father, isn't that what we are or should be genuinely occupied with doing right now?! "Nu!? Nu!!" He concluded, his eyes looking up to- "Abba!"

If tears or healthy prayer are not to be wasted, they need what we call Kavana-direction. The most romantic love letter will never hit the mark if the address is left off the envelope. When the Jewish People were languishing under the brutal tyranny of the Egyptians, they eventually let out a cry. That cry had a specific destination we are told. Now if that small detail had been left out, the critical message may never have been delivered and neither would we!

Have a good Shabbos

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