

# TEARS - A WATERSHED

*by Rabbi Eliyahu Hoffmann*

*You shall salt every meal-offering with salt; you may not discontinue the salt of G-d's covenant from upon your meal offering; on every offering you must offer salt. (2:13)*

When Hashem created the world, He decreed that there be a division (rakiafirmament) between the upper, Heavenly waters (mayim ha- elyonim) and the lower, earthly waters (mayim ha-tachtonim). The Midrash (Bereishis Rabbah 5:4) says that when the lower waters were separated from the upper waters, it was only amidst tears - apparently over their descent from the Heavens to the physical realm. In order to appease the earthly waters, Hashem promised them they would be offered upon the Altar (Mizbeach): Sea salt accompanied every korban mincha (meal offering), and once a year during Sukkos waters of libation (Nisuch Ha-mayim) were poured upon the Altar. This, says Rashi, explains the reference to G-d's covenant - the covenant He established with the mayim ha-tachtonim.

If so, it seems their mollification was only temporary, for with the destruction of the Beis Ha-mikdash (Holy Temple) and the cessation of its offerings, water and their salts were once again removed from their role of importance.

Regarding the Jews exile from Israel to Babylon (Bavel) it is written (Tehillim/Psalms 137:1), "On the Rivers of Babylon, there we sat, we also cried." We also cried implies there was someone else crying along with us. The co-criers, says R' Moshe Teitelbaum (Tefilah Le-Moshe al Tehillim quoted in Imrei Shammai), were the waters, who cried at once again losing their glory with the Jewish exile and destruction of the Holy Temple.

Chazal (our Sages) say (Bava Metzia 59b), "Sha'arei di-maos lo ni-na'alu, The Gates of Tears are never locked." Perhaps this saying is most suitable here. Tears consist of salt and water. Although the meal-offering salt and the libation waters have stopped, the offering of the broken- hearted tear will never cease to find favour in the eyes of Hashem. Whether tears of prayer, or of remorse and repentance, the gates of Heaven remain eternally open to a Jew who cries out from the depths of his heart. "The sacrifice G-d desires is a broken spirit; the broken and humble heart - G-d - You will not despise (Tehillim 51:19)."

Perhaps this is why the lower waters cried along with us at the time of our exile, not only in commiseration with our pain, but as a hint to us that when we cry out to Hashem with tears of salt and water, they will continue to retain their place of honour upon Hashem's holy Altar. Perhaps, as

well, this is what the Midrash (see above) means when it says the lower and upper waters were only separated amidst tears - not that the waters cried, but that the appeasement of Jewish tears, through which the salt and water would retain their eternal place among the offerings, was what convinced the lower waters to relent and separate from the mayim ha-elyonim.

The holy rebbe R' Yaakov Yitzchok of Lublin zt"l was better known as the Choize - the Seer - for with his holy eyes he was able to see far into the distance, and the future. Once, after Yom Kippur, his disciple, who was later to become known as the rebbe R' Bunim of Peshischa zt"l, asked him brazenly, "So, Rebbe, what's in store for me this year?"

"Do you really want to know?" the Choize asked. "The news isn't good."

"Yes, all the same I would still like to know."

"This year you will lose your entire wealth." R' Bunim was quite a wealthy and successful businessman. The prospect of losing everything seemed far-fetched but at the same time terrifying. And there was no doubt that if his Rebbe said it would be so, then so would it be. He told no one.

Not long after Sukkos, R' Bunim's young wife took sick. Knowing that he was going to lose everything anyway, he spent everything he had to get her the best medical care possible. With this, and a healthy degree of siyata di'Shemaya (Heavenly assistance), his wife baruch Hashem had a complete recovery. He now understood why the Choize had made an exception and told him his future, something he never did, because it made spending the money needed a whole lot easier.

Still, one must make a living. After his wife's recovery, R' Bunim travelled to one of the hotels in which he had done well in the past in hope of drumming up some new business. But word of his lack of capital had spread quickly, and he could find no one willing to extend him credit. A few exceptionally difficult weeks passed during which he accomplished nothing. One day, in total frustration, he went up to his room, closed the door, and began to cry. "Ribbono shel Olam - Master of the Universe - perhaps it was indeed decreed that I should lose everything this year, but I still have a wife and small children to support. Decree or no decree, I can't let them hunger. Please, Almighty G-d, help me to rebuild my wealth."

Leaving his room, R' Bunim for the umpteenth time approached a man he had once done business with, but this time things were different. The man offered R' Bunim a large shipment of goods to sell - and agreed to split the profits fifty-fifty. The goods sold quickly, and with the profits he earned, R' Bunim succeeded in restarting and rebuilding his own business. By year end, he had regained the wealth with which he began the year.

Travelling to the Choize once again, he smiled to himself; what would the Rebbe have to say about this "change of fate?" When the Choize gazed at his kvittel (paper with the names of his family given to a tzaddik), he saw all. "It is true," he said to R' Bunim, "that I told you this year you would lose everything. And it is true that I did not foresee that you would earn it back. But then we never spoke

about the power of prayer with tears!"

The holy Sanzer Rav zt"l used to say, "There's only one thing I'm scared of - a Jewish tear." What a shame it is if the Gates of Tears are left wide open, yet no one approaches to enter through them.

Have a good Shabbos.

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