

TEARS

by Rabbi Berel Wein

Yosef's actions towards his brothers are accompanied by much weeping on his part. We can well understand the emotional stress that he undergoes in confronting his brothers decades after they sold him into bondage and abandoned him to his fate. But Yosef weeps not only for himself and his own pain and angst. He weeps just as much for his brothers who also have had to live with their awful torturous secret for so long. And he also weeps for his beloved father, made old and bent by grief and travail.

Tears are seen as a precious commodity in Jewish thought and writings. The Lord, so to speak, counts every human tear and stores them in His eternal container. Tears are not forgotten. They are the true stuff of human memory. Eisav's claim against Yaakov is validated in the eyes of the Talmud because of the tears of anguish that he shed in the presence of his father Yitzchak. Yosef can wash his face and control himself from weeping in public before his brothers but he can never control the weeping of his heart and soul.

Life is truly a vale of tears. Yosef's private tears, more than anything else, are the focal point of his staged reunion with his brothers. When he can no longer control his outward tears and weeps in front of his brothers, the inner tears of his soul are revealed as well. When one's inner tears are also apparent to others, then reconciliation and harmony in a family can be achieved.

Tears do not always signify sadness or tragedy. At moments of supreme joy, happiness and satisfaction, copious tears flow from the eyes of humans. Yosef's tears are thus not only a product of sad memories and tragic situations but are also tears of hope and achievement as he begins to see the realization of his long lost dreams.

My grandfather, a distinguished Lithuanian rabbi in Chicago in the first part of the twentieth century, visited the Land of Israel in the 1930's. Upon his return to Chicago he was asked by one of his congregants whether the chalutzim who were farming the land wore kippot on their heads while working. He replied, "When I saw the Land of Israel being tilled by Jewish farmers after two thousands years of exile, my eyes welled with tears. I therefore was unable to see clearly what was worn on the heads of those farmers."

Tears of hope can erase from our vision scenes of trials and tribulations, failures and weaknesses. Yosef's tears will eventually blur the sight of his brothers in a bad and adversarial light and allow him to see them as brothers who made a mistake and have paid in full. Tears are therefore not only the

weapon of bitterness and recrimination. They are also the medium of compromise, harmony and reconciliation. And they can be the harbingers of hope and accomplishment if we will them to be that. Yosef's tears have washed the soul of Jews over millennia. They continue to influence our lives even today.

Shabat shalom.

Rabbi Berel Wein Rabbi Berel Wein- Jewish historian, author and international lecturer offers a complete selection of CDs, audio tapes, video tapes, DVDs, and books on Jewish history at www.rabbiwein.com

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