

“And the days of tearful mourning for Moshe ended.” (34:8)

In the Talmud Shabbos, 106a, Chazal say, “Whoever lets down/ weeps over the passing of an adam kasher -- upright, virtuous man -- Hashem counts his tears and puts them aside in His treasury.” What is the meaning of “counting tears,” and what is its significance? Olas Shlomo on Seder Kedoshim, cited by Shai LaTorah, explains that it is human nature to weep for a person who passes from This World, regardless of the level of his virtue. We are an emotional people. Therefore, when someone dies, our first reaction is to express our emotion – an emotion that may have little to do with the individual. Perhaps he is a relative, or a friend; perhaps we simply cry because when we hear of a death, we cry. Who does not shed a tear upon reading about a tragedy that has occurred? How are we to discern between the individual who cries for an adam kasher, and one who simply cries as an expression of emotion?

The duration of the weeping determines for whom and why we are weeping. An expression of emotion does not last long, unless it is for someone whose loss has left a tremendous void, someone who has inspired others with his behavior, with his brilliance, with his virtue. Indeed, for such an individual, as time goes by, the loss becomes more pronounced. Consequently, the original expression of grief is no indication of its focus. We could be crying for anyone. Only after a substantial amount of time has passed and one is still grief-stricken, do we have a clear intimation that this is not typical weeping for an ordinary person. These tears have special meaning, and they are valued by Hashem to the point that He counts and saves them.

Perhaps we may suggest a somewhat different approach. Adam kasher is a reference to a “good” Jew – not necessarily a brilliant Torah scholar, a great Torah luminary – just a simple Jew: a man of sterling character, impeccable behavior, devout and virtuous. This person does not make any “waves.” In fact, most people do not even know him. His picture is not in the paper every other week. His passing might be noted with a small obituary in the local paper. Instead of learning folios of Talmud, he recited Tehillim whenever he had the opportunity. He is what David Ha'melech in Sefer Tehillim 15 describes as “one who walks in perfect innocence, does what is right, and speaks the truth from his heart. He does not slander, nor does he do evil or disgrace his fellowman.” He neither takes advantage of others, nor can his integrity be compromised with special gifts. This is an adam kasher.

Regrettably, we do not often cry for such people, because in today's society they remain unnoticed. We do not realize that their loss creates an irreplaceable void in the Jewish community. When they are taken, the Shechinah feels the loss much more than we do. The Shechinah knows their contribution to Klal Yisrael, while we conveniently ignore it. When we weep over the passing of a great man, we cry over our loss. When we cry over the death of an adam kasher, we grieve over the Shechinah's loss. Hashem counts those tears, because they are altruistic; they are real.

Perhaps this is the underlying meaning of Chazal's statement when they say, “Kol ha'morid dema'os,” “Anyone who lets down tears.” Why did they not say, “Kol ha'bocheh,” “Anyone who

weeps?” I think that “bocheh” is spontaneous weeping. When we hear of a death, a sad occurrence, a tragedy – we cry. That is our first reaction as human beings. To “let down” tears, however, is an expression denoting thought, an intelligent appreciation of a situation, a cogent understanding of who it was that has passed away, as well as his contribution to the community and the consequent loss produced by his demise. When an “ordinary” man leaves this world, it takes a “thoughtful” and caring person to express his grief. Hashem values those tears because they have special meaning.