

The people wept that night. (14:1)

Klal Yisrael wept bitterly on that fateful night. The *meraglim* incited their fears, and their emotions broke through in profuse weeping. Unfortunately, their weeping was unwarranted, since the spies were spewing nothing but lies which were meant to inject fear in the hearts of the people. Had their faith and trust in Hashem been realized, their reaction would have been completely different. Hashem promised to transform their unwarranted weeping into warranted weeping, and we now commemorate *Tishah B'Av*, our day of national mourning. It is incredible that all of this tragedy was the result of baseless weeping. Understandably, one should not express emotion needlessly, but should this engender such punishment?

Perhaps a deeper understanding of the nature of tears will help us gain perspective. Tears are the symbol of the soul's inability to restrain its emotion. Expressing emotion is our way of releasing the pent-up tension within ourselves. When hearts are heavy, when the soul is overburdened, one releases tears. We manifest a greater element of sincerity in tears than in other forms of emotional expression, since they come from the heart. Therefore, when *Klal Yisrael* tearfully expressed their fears, they meant it. They lacked faith; they had no trust. The only way to repair such a breach of *emunah* is to apply the same sincerity via unwarranted weeping. It is sad that it had to come to this, but, unfortunately, the people showed their true colors.

Let us digress and reflect on the positive effect of tears. *Chazal* assert (*Bava Metzia* 59a), "Even when the *Shaarei Tefillah*, Heavenly gates of prayer, are sealed, the *Shaarei Dema'os*, gates of tears, remain open." Tears are diamonds, which one should "save" and use sparingly for heartfelt prayer, to express sincere emotion. They have the power to pave the way, accelerate the course of the prayers, so that they reach and achieve their intended goal. As a young child, the *Bircas Shmuel*, *Horav Baruch Ber Leibowitz, zl*, was once disciplined by his father. The young boy began to cry. In the middle of his weeping, he grabbed a *siddur* and began to *daven Minchah*. His father questioned his behavior, "Why are you *davening* now?" The (future *Rosh Yeshivah* of Kaminitz) young boy replied, "I am crying anyway. Better I should make good use of my tears by having them accompany my *Minchah*, than to waste them over a discipline issue."

The Russian government issued a decree against the Jews. The minister who was behind this decree was a rabid anti-Semite whose virulent hatred for the Jewish people was infamous. The Jewish community immediately turned to the Torah leader of the generation, *Horav Chaim Volozhiner, zl*, and asked him to intercede on its behalf. *Rav Chaim* immediately left for St. Petersburg, accompanied by another Jewish lay leader. When they arrived at the ministry, they were asked what had brought them there. *Rav Chaim* replied, "Bribes." The minister, who had issued the decree, became livid, "Do you think that your money can sway someone like me?" *Rav Chaim* explained that his idea of a bribe was not a material bribe, but *shochad shel de'maos*, a bribe consisting of tears. *Rav Chaim* immediately broke down in uncontrollable, bitter weeping. The minister was so moved by *Rav Chaim's* weeping that he abolished his earlier decree. Afterwards, he turned to *Rav Chaim* and said, "What will be with the Jewish People in the future, when they no

longer have such leaders who will unabashedly express their emotions, who will cry like a baby – without shame, heedless of how they are perceived, all because of their boundless love for their people?” Unfortunately, future leaders will be more concerned with appearances and acceptance in the eyes of those who would otherwise do them harm.