

Leah's eyes were tender. (29:17)

Rashi comments that Leah *Imeinu's* eyes were tender due to her incessant weeping. She thought that, as she was the older sister; it would be her lot to fall into the hands of Eisav for the purpose of marriage. This was clearly a reason to cry. Tears play a significant role in our relationship with the Almighty, especially in the area of prayer; indeed, weeping is considered a form of supplication. In one of the most moving elegies of the *Selichos* prayers, we ask Hashem: *Yehi ratzon*, "May it be Your will, You who hear the sound of weeping, that You place our tears in Your flask permanently, and that You rescue us from all cruel decrees, for on You alone our eyes are fixed."

The Almighty listens and discerns between the various tears that a person emits. He Who delves into the hearts of men knows which tears are from a pure source, to which ones He will listen and place in a special "container" for posterity. Our sages teach that with the destruction of the *Bais Hamikdash*, the *Shaarei Tefillah*, Gates of Prayer, were closed. Prayer does not access the Heavenly Gates as it once did, but, *Shaarei Demaos*, the Gates of Tears, remain open, allowing for the result of genuine emotion, pure tears, to enter and achieve efficacy. Why are tears different than prayer? What gives tears greater capability than genuine prayer?

Horav Chaim Zaitchik, zl, explains that tears are multi-faceted. They are a form of prayer; they are an entreaty; and they are a *hirhur teshuvah*, expression of thoughts of repentance. While they are all these, tears go deeper than prayer. They are an expression of greater profundity than even genuine prayer. Tears are the expression of a stormy heart, a broken heart, a prayer that became emotional, that achieved such purity that it expressed itself through pure emotion. Tears contain the key to access the Gates of Heaven, because they are the ultimate expression of the heart.

There is a problem, however – even with the purest of tears. *Rav Zaitchik* gives this a practical application. Reuven insults Shimon. Shimon has been hurt, humiliated and brought to tears. He expresses his pain in the most common manner. Reuven has by now realized the hurt he caused, and, as a result, seeks forgiveness and repentance. He cries out to Hashem, begging forgiveness for the pain that he brought to Shimon. His tears are sincere – but, so are those of Shimon. The tears of Reuven, the offender, the *baal teshuvah*, ascend to Heaven and confront another set of tears – those of Shimon. Whose tears will prevail? Heaven determines whose tears will achieve greater efficacy: those of the offender who now seeks forgiveness, or those of the one whose life was made unbearable, who cries out in pain and misery?

"And he (Eisav) cried out an exceedingly great and bitter cry" (*Bereishis* 27:34). Eisav returned from the field to discover that Yaakov had received the blessings. Can we imagine Eisav's pain as he cried out? This pain was inadvertently catalyzed by Yaakov. *Chazal* teach that Eisav's hurt was "compensated" years later in Persia, when Yaakov's descendant, Mordechai *HaYehudi* tore his clothes and wept bitterly concerning the evil decree passed against the Jews by Achashveirosh. Agag, king of Amalek groaned while in prison. This catalyzed Haman's birth. When we realize the effect the tears of even a *rasha*, wicked person, we begin to imagine how far-reaching are the tears

of those whom we humiliate, oppress, or even whose feelings we inadvertently hurt. Tears are powerful.

Rav Zaitchik quotes a *Midrash* that is frightening in its implications. *Chazal* teach that *Rachel Imeinu* died prior to her sister *Leah*, because she spoke before her, thereby indicating a hint of lack of respect. Let us take into account that *Rachel* gave everything up for *Leah*. She not only gave her the signs that *Yaakov* had given her, but she also hid in her room and spoke instead of *Leah*, so that her sister would not become embarrassed. She gave up her opportunity to marry *Yaakov* first, just to prevent *Leah's* humiliation. Yet, because she spoke before her, she preceded *Leah* in death! Is this not mind-boggling?

Leah, however, was used to weeping. *Leah's* emotions were unusually raw. Therefore, in response to a minor slight to her character, her emotions were immediately revealed. The *Rambam* in *Hilchos Avadim* 1:7 writes that one must be unusually careful not to cause emotional pain to a slave, because his self-esteem is very low and his negative reaction will thus be quickly forthcoming.