

And the eyes of Leah were soft. (29:17)

Why were Leah's eyes soft? *Chazal* (*Bava Basra* 123) explain that Leah heard the conversation of people who would talk among themselves. "Rivkah had two sons; her brother, Lavan, had two daughters. The older daughter is (apparently) promised to the older son, and the younger daughter to the younger son." Leah asked concerning the nature of the older son's endeavors. (Obviously, if she were destined to marry him, it would be nice to know what type of life she was destined to have.) The response was: "The older son is an evil, base person, a thief who preys on the innocent." When she asked about the younger son, the reply was: *Ish tam yosheiv ohalim*; "A simple, wholesome man abiding in tents." When she heard this, she wept copiously until her eyelashes separated.

Horav Nosson Wachtfogel, zl, derives from here a lesson concerning the enormous power of tears. It is well-known that prayers have an amazing effect on achieving one's goals. Hashem listens to sincere prayer. We now see that tears (prayer with tears) have an even greater effect, such that it is possible to abrogate a decree. Leah *Imeinu* was well aware that forty days prior to her birth a Heavenly decree had announced who her designated spouse would be. How could she possibly change that decree? She was supposed to fall to Eisav, an eventuality that she dreaded. She did not give up hope. What was her secret "weapon"? How could she hope to extirpate what had been decreed prior to her birth? Tears. With tears, one is able to achieve what prayer alone cannot.

Chazal (*Berachos* 32) state: "From the day that the *Bais Hamikdash* was destroyed, the gates of prayer have been closed. Although the gates of prayer are no longer open, the gates of tears are not closed." While the depth of *Chazal's* statement obviously requires deeper clarification, one thing is clear: Through the vehicle of tears, one is able to penetrate Divine sanctuaries which otherwise are not accessible through prayer. Leah did not simply cry once, twice; she cried incessantly, until her eyelashes fell off! Her tears supported her fervent prayer until, finally, Hashem accepted her plea to be free of the curse of becoming Eisav's mate. He removed her from Eisav's domain and placed her in the domain of the *Avos ha'kedoshim*, holy Patriarchs. Thus, she not only became a Matriarch, she became the progenitress of six *Shevatim*, tribes, of *Klal Yisrael*. She achieved all of this through her tears.

What is so special about tears? *Horav S.R. Hirsch, zl*, explains that tears are the sweat of the soul. Tears emanate from the heart. They are authentic. Real tears cannot be simulated. Prayer that is accompanied by tears has greater efficacy, because it has greater authenticity.

Throughout the annals of history, we have heard of *gedolei Yisrael*, Torah leaders, who have achieved their pinnacle of achievement due to their profuse weeping. Their copious tears ascended Heavenward and made the difference. The *Chafetz Chaim, zl*, had an old worn-out *siddur*, an inheritance from his saintly mother, which he cherished and held close. He often declared that whatever "little" he had achieved in his life was all *b'zchus*, in the merit, of this *siddur*. His mother had prayed constantly from this *siddur*. Her prayers were accompanied by her sincere weeping.

For what did she pray? – Neither for honor, nor for wealth; she beseeched the Almighty that her young son grow into a *talmid chacham*, Torah scholar, a G-d-fearing, ethically correct, Torah Jew. Her tears made the difference, and we -- in fact, the entire Jewish world -- are their beneficiaries.