

For a grown man, Joseph cried a lot. He cried when his brothers expressed regret for having sold him into slavery. He cried again when he saw Benjamin for the first time after many years of forced separation. He cried when the brothers pleaded for Benjamin's life. He cried again when he revealed himself to his brothers and when he reconciled with Benjamin and the rest of his brothers. He cried when he reunited with Jacob in Egypt and when Jacob died. Finally, he cried when the brothers offered themselves as slaves after Jacob's death. On the other hand, his brothers never cried. When Reuben realized that Joseph was sold into slavery, he rend his clothes but did not cry. When they realized that their money was returned to them in their sacks they are frightened, but do not cry. What was different about Joseph when it came to expressing his emotions that distinguished him from the rest of his family?

Among the brothers, Joseph alone is included in the group of seven patriarchs that include Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, Aaron and David. If we look closely at all of them, we see that at some point in time, each of them is connected with the term בכי, they cried. Abraham cried after the death of his beloved Sarah. After Joseph's disappearance, Isaac wept for Jacob who was kept in the dark regarding the fact that Joseph was still alive and was sold as a slave. Jacob cried when he met Rachel for the first time upon his arrival in Charan. Moses cried when the children of Israel sinned with the daughters of Moab and Zimri brought Kazbi before the elders. King David writes about crying numerous times in Psalms.

What does crying convey? The ability to speak and convey his thoughts differentiates man from the animal kingdom. While the beast is capable of expressing pain, man can rationalize his pain and express it to someone else. Sometimes his pain is so acute that words cannot express the depth of emotion he feels. Instead, he cries and his tears substitute for his words. All his sophistication fails him and he realizes that the best medium to express his pain is the most basic one, by crying out. In the Book of Lamentations (איכה א ב), Jeremiah says בכו תבכה בלילה, crying expresses the immense pain of the destruction of the Temple and the exile of the people. Where words fail to capture the feeling of loss, a simple cry can speak volumes.

On Rosh Ha Shana we rely on the simple sounds of the Shofar to express Gd's dominion and reign over all and to ask forgiveness for our transgressions. As the Gemara says (ראש השנה טז א):

ואמרו לפני בראש השנה מלכיות זכרונות ושופרות. מלכיות — כדי שתמליכוני עליכם, זכרונות — כדי שישעלה זכרוניכם לפני לטובה, ובמה — בשופר

We are obligated to recite מלכיות before Gd but the mode of speech is the simple sound of the Shofar. The Talmud tells us simple sound is equivalent to speech.

When Jacob asked Joseph to bury him in Hebron at the מערת המכפלה, he reminded Joseph that he did not bury his mother Rachel there. Instead he buried her outside the original boundaries of the land of Israel. Rashi quotes the Midrash that there was a reason for burying her in Bethlehem. When her children will be exiled, she will stand before Gd and her cries would bring out a torrent of tears that would move Gd, כביכול, to promise to return them to their homeland (ירמיה-ו לא טו-טז)

כֹּה אָמַר יְהוָה קוֹל בְּרָמָה נִשְׁמָע נְהִי בְּכִי תַמְרוּרִים רַחֵל מִבְּכָה עַל-בָּנֶיהָ מֵאֲנָה לְהַנָּחִם עַל-בָּנֶיהָ כִּי אֵינָנוּ: כֹּה אָמַר יְהוָה מִנְעִי קוֹלֶךָ מִבְּכִי וְעֵינַיִךָ מִדְּמָעָה כִּי יֵשׁ שָׂכָר לְפַעֲלֹתֶךָ נְאֻם-יְהוָה וְשָׁבוּ מֵאֶרֶץ אוֹיֵב:

The word מִבְּכָה is interesting. It is the causative form of to cry. Rachel cried herself, but she also had the ability to elicit cries from others who, on their own, were not moved to tears by the situation. This was a quality that she alone among the matriarchs possessed. Despite all her difficulties recounted in the Torah, Leah never cried. Neither Sarah nor Rebekah cried. They all prayed, but did not cry. Likewise, Leah's children do not cry. They call out in anguish on several occasions, but are never moved to tears. Jacob told Joseph that his mother alone possessed the power of prayer exemplified by crying. It was too important to forego for when it will be needed in the future and he therefore resisted the temptation to bury her in Hebron.

After Joseph revealed himself to his brothers, he cried on Benjamin's neck and Benjamin responded by crying on his. When he spoke with each of the brothers, the Torah tells us that Joseph cried but apparently the brothers did not reciprocate. Joseph and Benjamin learned the importance and power of tears and crying from their mother, Rachel. Leah's children apparently did not pick up that character trait from their mother. Where Joseph and Benjamin relied on tears to convey their emotions, Leah's children could not bring themselves to shed a single tear even when they begged for mercy from Joseph after Jacob's passing. Again it is Joseph who shows the power of tears to acknowledge the will of Gd and to put them at ease.

The pain Joseph felt at being rejected and ostracized by his brothers years before was beyond words. The magnitude of what he went through could only be conveyed by the most basic form of communication, cries and tears. Across the generations, Jewish leaders were distinguished by their ability to empathize with their communities, to feel their pain as their own and cry out with them for help. They cried with their communities tears of suffering and tears of joy. They followed, and continue to follow, in the footsteps of our patriarchs, as exemplified by Joseph.

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