

The Impact of Tearful Prayers

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Question: The Talmud contends that "from the day that the Beit HaMikdash was destroyed, the gates of prayer were locked...but the gates of tears were never sealed". (Bava Metzia 59a-Berakhot 32b) The implication is that tears have an impact upon prayers. Or better yet, tearful prayers are always in order. How are tearful prayers more significant or potent than simple prayers without tears?

Response: The Talmud states (Sotah 11a) that prior to the enactment of the evil decrees which enslaved the Jews in Egypt, Pharaoh sought the counsel of three sages. Job was silent at this meeting and subsequently was punished by the Almighty for his silence by the affliction of pain. Yet punishment in the Bible generally relates in some form to the nature of the crime. In this situation the punishment of pain in no way relates to the sin of Job. Also, it is necessary to determine the nature of Job's immoral behavior. What sin did he commit by being silent? Yes, his silence may be construed as a form of acquiescence to the slavery of the Israelites promulgated by Pharaoh. But is it not possible that Job firmly believed that any action or statement on his part would be to no avail? What impact would his demurral have upon Pharaoh? How could one individual go against the mighty legions and the powerful Egyptian military machine? Sensing, therefore, the futility of any contrary position, Job merely was silent. Was this silence such a grievous crime that Job was subsequently punished by the agony of constant physical pain and sickness?

Our sages contend that the punishment of pain was a divine lesson to Job, and through him to all mankind, that the argument of futility is not morally adequate to sustain silence in times of danger. Job was afflicted with such severe ailments that he cried out constantly because of the unbearable agony of the pain. Why

did he cry? Why did he publicly bemoan his physical pain? Did he not know that screaming and moaning do not help the condition? Is it not futile to moan when one is in pain? The answer is that it is the nature of man to cry out when he hurts. Crying does not stop the pain, but, rather, gives evidence that the pain exists. It is the manifestation that something internally is wrong. The silent person is basically the one who does not poignantly feel pain. All is well - there is no reason to cry. Job's reaction to his own plight, and his silence in the face of impending danger to the Israelites, proved that Job felt no internal pain when Israelites were killed. Job cried over his personal problems, not over pogroms to Israelites. The enslavement and the possible ultimate destruction of the Israelite people did not disturb Job's emotional tranquility. Had Job been a friend to the Israelite people, then the silence would have been impossible. The natural human strands of emotions would have evoked a verbal crescendo of pain. Silence was, therefore, evidence of no concern and no personal involvement. For this reason, Job's silence was marked as a message of immorality. (Sihot Musar; Rav Hayyim Shmuelevitz, Rosh HaYeshiva, Mir, Jerusalem - 5733, Ma'amar 5)