

# Fascinating INSIGHTS

ג' טבת תשפ"א

December 18, 2020

פרשת מקץ

9<sup>th</sup> year, edition 365

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## Tears that Tear

We are taught that Tefila stands at the pinnacle of the world (עומדים ברומו של עולם) but people treat it lightly.<sup>1</sup> Why is the term עומדים used? What does it mean that Tefila stands at the height of the world?

The Gemara<sup>2</sup> says that from the day the Beis Hamikdash was destroyed, the heavenly gates of Tefila were locked but the gates of tears weren't locked. The Divrei Yoel<sup>3</sup> explains that when a Jew cries by Tefila, the gates are opened and the Tefilos of everyone that are standing at the height of the world enter. This is why it says עומדים ברומו של עולם because Tefilos stand and wait to enter, waiting until the tears of a person open the gates.

This can be compared to the door of a public building that is locked where when someone opens it with the key, everyone that was waiting there now can get in.

When the construction of the men's section of the Belzer Beis Midrash in Europe in the 1800s was finished, R' Shalom Belzer<sup>4</sup> didn't allow Tefilos there until the women's section was completed. He explained that since only "the gates of tears are not locked," how will their Tefilos ascend. They need the Tefilos of the women because they are more inclined to cry. Their tears will open up the gates for everyone's Tefila.

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## Tattoos of Pride

R' Eliezer Silver (1882-1968) was asked about removing the tattooed numbers from the arms of Jews after the Holocaust. He said not to remove them. He said further that through the numbers, they are fulfilling the mitzva of Zechiras Maaseh Amaleik (recalling Amaleik's attack on the Jews).<sup>5</sup>

R' Yitzchak Zilberstein<sup>6</sup> received a letter which was accompanied by a picture of an Arab looking man

<sup>4</sup> R' Shalom Belzer, the first Belzer Rebbe, personally helped build this big shul. Dedicated in 1843, the building resembled an ancient fortress, with 3-foot-thick walls, a castellated roof, and battlements adorned with gilded gold balls. It could seat 5,000 people, and had superb acoustics. It stood until the Nazis invaded Belz in late 1939. Though the Germans attempted to destroy the shul, first by fire, and then by dynamite, they were unsuccessful. Finally, they conscripted Jewish men in forced labor to take the building apart, brick by brick. The Belz Beis Midrash in Yerushalayim today is an enlarged replica of the structure of this Beis Midrash of R' Shalom Belzer. Like the original shul, which took 15 years to complete, the Belz shul in Yerushalayim also took 15 years to construct. It was dedicated in the year 2000.

<sup>5</sup> Chashukei Chemed, Kesubos 26b, s.v. ויעין. This is one of the Sheish Zechiros ("six remembrances") that we say after Shacharis.

<sup>6</sup> Aleinu L'shabayach, Kedoshiim, 19:28. R' Yitzchak Zilberstein, who was born in Poland in 1934, is the rav of the Ramat Elchonon neighborhood of Bnei Brak and Rosh Kollel in Cholon. He is also the rav of Mayanei Hayeshua Hospital in Bnei Brak. His family emigrated to Palestine while he was a young boy, and he studied in the Eitz Chaim Yeshiva in Yerushalayim under R' Aryeh Levin. In his teen years R' Zilberstein studied in the Slabodka yeshiva in Bnei Brak, where he became a student of R' Yechezkel Abramsky, who gave him semicha. After marrying the daughter of R' Elyashiv (granddaughter of R' Aryeh Levin), he learned in kollel in Bnei Brak, and received another semicha, this time from R' Shmuel Wosner. Subsequently, R' Zilberstein moved his family to Switzerland, where he served as a rosh mesivta and magid shiur in the Yeshiva of Lucerne for several years. Upon their return to Israel, R' Zilberstein headed the Beis David Institutions in Cholon, a largely secular city where he exerted a great influence over the entire community through his shiurim, including a monthly shiur which he gave to religious and secular doctors on the topic of healing and halacha. Beis David includes a Beis Midrash, a kiruv institution, shiurim for baalei teshuvah,

<sup>1</sup> Brachos 6b with Rashi s.v. Devarim.

<sup>2</sup> Brachos 32b.

<sup>3</sup> Eikev, p. 67. Also brought in the Beirech Moshe, Vayishlach, s.v. ויתבאר. R' Baruch Ber Leibowitz once received a slap from his father. In the middle of his crying he went to daven Mincha. When his father asked him why he went to daven amidst his tears, R' Baruch Ber answered, "since I am crying now anyway, I may as well use the tears for davening."

whose hand was tattooed with a Magen Dovid (Star of David). His mother who was Jewish was abducted...and was forced to marry a Muslim. To prevent her Jewish son from marrying a Muslim woman...the mother tattooed a Magen Dovid onto her son's hand so that he would know he is a Jew and not marry a Muslim. The man who lived in an Egyptian village had to conceal the tattoo on his hand so that he wouldn't be murdered... The question that arose was the following: Was it permissible for this mother to tattoo her son's hand (which the Torah prohibits) to prevent him from intermarrying? In his response, R' Zilberstein applied what the Chikrei Lev says elsewhere where he permits that which is forbidden to avoid a bigger prohibition. The same applies here. Also, since it is a great mitzva to prevent a Jew from intermarrying it would be permitted for the mother to have the tattoo placed on her child. This was especially true because the tattoo of the Magen Dovid was an image, not written with letters.<sup>7</sup>

R' Hanoch Teller writes a story he personally witnessed regarding a young man, Jamie, who had recently become Torah observant and went to immerse in a busy Mikva in Yerushalayim. As he walked towards the Mikva, he held his hands over his arms, attempting to cover his tattoos.<sup>8</sup> As he stepped into the Mikva, he slipped and the tattoos that lined his biceps were now exposed for all to see. At an earlier time, Jamie had viewed his tattoos with pride, but that afternoon he felt humiliation. An elderly Jew stepped forward and in a heavily accented English declared, "Look here, I also have a tattoo." Stretching out his frail arm, the man pointed to the row of numbers tattooed on his arm. "It seems we have both come a long way."

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### Facing Our Fears

Everyone has fears. The question is do we let fears stop us? Do we avoid being a Chazzan for davening because of fear? Do we fear becoming great in avodas Hashem since this then gives us an enormous responsibility? Do we avoid speaking publicly? Do we avoid asking someone a question in learning because he may think we are not as great as he thought? Do we avoid a business deal because of fears? Do we flatter certain people due to a fear of disapproval? Fear is an obstacle to

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a kollel that caters to hundreds of *yungerleit*, a *Beis Din*, and a staff of *talmidei chachomim* charged with answering *shailos*. In 1981 he was appointed *rav* and *av beis din* of the Ramat Elchonon neighborhood of Bnei Brak. After the death of his first wife in 1999, with whom he had two sons and one daughter, he remarried. His *sefarim* include *Aleinu L'shabayach*, *Tuvcha Yabi'u*, *Barchi Nafshi*, and *Chashukei Chemed* (on *Shas*).  
<sup>7</sup> See *Pischei Teshuva*, *Yoreh Deah* 180:1 in the name of the *Meil Tzedaka* that the biblical prohibition of tattoos is only when tattooing letters.

<sup>8</sup> R' Yitzchak Yaakov Weiss (1902-1989) was asked (*Shu"t Minchas Yitzchak*, 3:11) about a soldier who while serving in the army got a tattoo of an immodest woman on his left arm where the *Tefillin Shel Yad* is placed. Now he became a *Baal Teshuvah* and began to daven. He wanted to know if he can put the *Tefillin* on his left arm on the image or if he should put it on his right arm.

success.<sup>9</sup> Successful people act in spite of fear whereas others let fear stop them.<sup>10</sup> It has been said that fear are the initials: forget everything and run or face everything and rise.<sup>11</sup> The saying goes "you can try and fail but never fail to try." We must keep in mind that there is nothing to fear but fear itself.

Through overcoming fear, we can become great.<sup>12</sup> R' Baruch Mezbitzer (1698-1760) once remarked there are people who are afraid of swallowing an ant but are unafraid of swallowing a man alive (not utilizing their potential).<sup>13</sup> On the words *לֹא תִגְנוּב*, *Rashi*<sup>14</sup> comments that it refers to *גונב נפשות*, kidnapping. A deeper explanation is that it refers to one killing his potential.<sup>15</sup> "Great people are made not born."

We know that a child is fearless.<sup>16</sup> Yehuda said *איך אתי אבי והנער אינו אתי*, *אעלה אל אבי והנער אינו אתי*, how will I go up to my father if the youth (*Binyomin*) isn't with me.<sup>17</sup> Another explanation is that how can I go up to my father in heaven—Hashem—after my death without the fearlessness that I had when I was a child since with that ability I can accomplish greatly.

A ship in a harbor is safe but that is not what it is built for. Just as a ship soars through the waves of the seas so too we need to soar through the waves (fears) of life. For this reason, *אנייה*, ship<sup>18</sup> is rooted in *אני*, I, as we are the captain of the ship and should soar through the waves of life.<sup>19</sup>

Rabbi Alt merited to learn under the tutelage of R' Mordechai Friedlander *Ztz"l* for close to five years. He received *Semicha* from R' Zalman Nechemia Goldberg *Ztz"l*. Rabbi Alt has written on numerous topics for various websites and publications and is the author of the *Sefer, Fascinating Insights: Torah Perspectives on Unique Topics*. His writings inspire people across the spectrum of Jewish observance to live with the vibrancy and beauty of Torah. He lives with his wife and family in a suburb of Yerushalayim where he studies, writes, and teaches. The author is passionate about teaching Jews of all levels of observance.

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<sup>9</sup> It has been said "if you are willing to do only what is easy, life will be hard. But if you are willing to do what is hard, life will be easy."

<sup>10</sup> So, it is not necessary to get rid of fear in order to succeed, just don't let it stop you.

<sup>11</sup> When we run from something, it stays with us longer. When we fight something, it makes us stronger.

<sup>12</sup> There is an expression, "Most things you ever wanted are on the other side of fear."

<sup>13</sup> The *Maharal* (*Tiferes Yisrael*, chapter 3) explains that the word *אדם* is related to *אדמה* since the ground contains lots of potential within it which it can bring forth to fruition—trees, plant life, and so forth. The same is with man as he has lots of potential within him. This explains why it is called 'the fruits of man' as in ...*אמר צדיק...פרי*, ... the fruit of their deeds (*Yeshaya* 3:10).

<sup>14</sup> *Shemos* 20:13.

<sup>15</sup> "When we treat man as he is, we make him worse than he is. When we treat him as if he already were what he potentially could be, we make him what he should be."

<sup>16</sup> Parenthetically, the *Magid of Mezerich* once remarked I learned three things from little children. 1) They are always happy. 2) They are never idle (always busy). 3) When they need something they cry out.

<sup>17</sup> *Breishis* 44:34.

<sup>18</sup> As in *Mishlei* 30:19 and *Yonah* 1:3.

<sup>19</sup> Once we have overcome fear many times, we have that momentum and it makes it easier for us in the future. The more we grow, the more our problems shrink. "Big problems become small when we become big." It is never about the size of our problems rather the size of us!