

6:8

רַבִּי שִׁמְעוֹן בֶּן מִנְסִיָּא אוֹמֵר מְשׁוּם רַבִּי שִׁמְעוֹן בֶּן יוֹחֵי:
הַנּוֹי, וְהַפֶּתַח, וְהָעֵשָׂה, וְהַכְּבוֹד, וְהַחֲכָמָה, וְהַזְקָנָה, וְהַשִּׁיבָה,
וְהַבָּנִים – בָּאָה לְצַדִּיקִים וּבָאָה לְעוֹלָם, שְׁנֵאמַר: עֲטָרַת
תְּפִאֲרַת שִׁיבָה, בְּדַרְךְ צְדָקָה תִּמְצָא (מְשָׁלִי טו:ל"א). וְאוֹמֵר:
עֲטָרַת זְקֵנִים בְּנֵי בָנִים, וְתְּפִאֲרַת בָּנִים אֲבוֹתָם (מְשָׁלִי יז:ו).
וְאוֹמֵר: תְּפִאֲרַת בְּחוּרִים כְּחָם, וְהַדָּר זְקֵנִים שִׁיבָה (מְשָׁלִי
כ"ב:ט). וְאוֹמֵר: וְחִפְרָה הַלְּבָנָה וּבוֹשָׁה הַחֲמָה, כִּי־מִלֶּךְ יִי
צָבָאוֹת בְּהַר צִיּוֹן וּבִירוּשָׁלַיִם, וּנְגִד זְקֵנָיו כְּבוֹד (יִשְׁעִיָּהוּ כד:כ"ג).
רַבִּי שִׁמְעוֹן בֶּן מִנְסִיָּא אוֹמֵר: אֵלּוּ שֶׁבַע מִדּוֹת, שֶׁמָּנּוּ
חֲכָמִים לְצַדִּיקִים – כֻּלָּם נִתְקַיְמוּ בְּרַבִּי וּבְבָנָיו.

Rabbi Shimon ben Y'hudah says in the name of Rabbi Shimon ben Yochai: Beauty, strength, wealth, honor, wisdom, old age, hoary age, and children—these befit the righteous and befit the world, as it is said: “Ripe old age is a crown of splendor, it can be found in the path of righteousness” (Proverbs 16:31). And it says: “Children’s children are the crown of the aged, and the glory of the children is their father’s” (Proverbs 17:6). And it says: “The splendor of young men is their strength, and glory of old men is hoary age” (Proverbs 20:29). And it says: “The moon will grow pale and the sun be shamed, when the Eternal, Master of Legions, will have reigned on Mount Zion and in Jerusalem, and honor shall be before God’s elders” (Isaiah 24:23). Rabbi Shimon ben M'nasya said: These seven qualities that the Sages attributed to the righteous were all realized in Rabbi and his sons.

SCIENCE HAS FOUND that no two tears are physically alike. Every act of crying is unique, as if each emotional outpouring, unique in its own right, must be expressed distinctively. A midrash teaches that there are six kinds of tears, three beneficial and three harmful.⁴⁷¹ Such

a statement shows that humans are predisposed to understanding the nuances of our own emotions and that even tears can be used as vehicles for growth and inner reflection.

This mishnah recognizes the uniqueness of each human as something that never existed before and never will again. Rabbi Shimon's scope dares us to think less about our physical selves and more about our spiritual well-being.

If we are engaged in passionate, creative Torah learning, then our body's age is meaningless. The physical body may get older, but the soul only grows stronger. Getting older means that one has had more of a chance to learn, grow, and internalize the timeless precepts that preceded and will succeed one's corporeal existence. When you engage with life, you are sage-ing more than aging. Most important to the Torah enterprise is that learning makes us more righteous and more engaged in the universe.

Yet, the cruel irony of learning is that the human life span is remarkably short. We require daily spiritual activities to remind us of this stubborn truth. A person who lives to eighty will take about 672,768,000 breaths, but the shofar sounds a noise only if someone blows into it. So, too, our soul prays only if we allow God to breathe through us. Tap into the divine breath that breathes through you like a divine shofar! Feel the gratitude, the intimacy.

When we encounter others, we must see beyond the surface. Rabbi Alexandri, a scholar from the amoraic era (ca. 200–500 CE), teaches, "If a common person uses a broken vessel, it is considered a disgrace. But not the Holy One of Blessing. All of God's vessels are broken. 'God is near the brokenhearted' (Psalm 34)."⁴⁷²

To achieve the highest holiness, we must gain freedom. Many consider themselves free who, from the Torah's perspective, remain enslaved. Rabbi Kook explains that there are intelligent slaves whose being is full of freedom, and there are free individuals whose being consists of the spirit of a slave.⁴⁷³ The real slave is one who lives in conformity, seeking to be honored by others. The free individual experiences inner individuality and the eternal illumination of God within oneself.

The opportunities to truly see ourselves and others are right before

our eyes. Therein lies our freedom and, indeed, our dignity. To emulate the Divine, we should be focused on the most powerless rather than the most powerful, the most broken rather than the most fortunate. We must witness the suffering right before our eyes. A Chasidic tale:

The Sassover Rebbe entered a hotel, and sat beside two local peasants. As the two peasants sat at the bar and drank, they began to fall into a drunken stupor. One turned to his friend and said, "Tell me, friend, do you love me?" His colleague responded, "Of course I love you. We're drinking companions. Naturally I love you." Then the first one said to his friend, "Then tell me, friend, what causes me pain?" His colleague said, "How should I know what hurts you? I'm just your drinking buddy." He said, "If you loved me you would know what causes me pain."⁴⁷⁴

Opening our eyes requires readiness to cry and see others' tears. All express emotion differently; some tear up at the slightest stimulus, while others are dry-eyed amid the most trying situations. Though emotions and tears are deeply personal, they also reflect spirituality and connection to God. Let us further explore the theological significance of our tears.

Rabbi Jonathan Sacks tells of a Chasidic rebbe during the Holocaust and of the danger of divine tears:

In the Warsaw ghetto there lived and died a great and saintly Hassidic Rebbe, Rabbi Kalonymous Shapiro. Throughout the years 1941–1943 he taught his disciples, and wrote down [their] addresses . . . in a book. Knowing he would not survive, he buried the book under the ground. It was discovered after the war. As the weeks went by, Rabbi Shapiro saw his community, his friends, his family, his children, one by one, taken to the extermination camps. And still he taught, though with greater and greater pain, until one day, he told his disciples that God Himself was weeping, and if a single tear were to escape from heaven to earth, it would destroy the world.⁴⁷⁵

In this anecdote, we see the preciousness of inhabiting the memory of where we are and the tears that are shed when we imbue objects with significance. Even objects that have no inherent holiness can be

rendered sacred through contextual circumstance. Such a thought is also based upon a Talmudic teaching:

What are the *z'vaot* [i.e., what does this term *z'vaot* mean]? Rabbi K'tina said, "An earthquake." Rabbi K'tina was walking along the road. When he came to the door of the house of a bone necromancer, [the earth] shuddered and quaked. He said, "Does the necromancer know how such an earthquake comes to be?" He shouted out to him, "K'tina, K'tina, why should I not know? When the Holy One of Blessing remembers God's children, who endure the misery among the nations of the world, God sheds two tears into the Great Sea, and its sound is heard from one end of the world to the other, and this is [what we perceive as] an earthquake!" (BT *B'rachot* 59a)

Not only do God's tears affect us. Rabbi Levi Yitzchak of Berdichev, the K'dushat Levi, taught that the emotions we express on earth deeply affect the heavens.^{475a} God hears and feels our pain—a profound idea that we should consider during our times of agony. Our tears, pain, oppression, and anxiety reach the heavens. The Talmud teaches, "The 'meek [*tz'nuot*]' among them weep, and their tears reach the heavenly throne because the gates to accept 'those who are oppressed' and the gates to accept 'tears' are never closed" (BT *Bava M'tzia* 59b).

This Talmudic lesson from *B'rachot* teaches something extraordinary: Tears are miraculous, and the eyes behind the tears are the gateway into realms mysterious and eternal. Tears are an external divine reminder of the intensity of our inner, and hidden, worlds. These simple drops of water reveal something complex and profound about the human spiritual condition. Regardless of how we each express our emotions—readily or reluctantly—we should take time to consider the power and uniqueness of our being and self-expression.