



Bringing Your Tears

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The Tisch: Degel Maḥaneh Efrayim #4

God, understandably, demands the first and the best. In Shemot 22:28, God asks for three timely gifts: *milei'atekha*, *dim'akha*, and *bekhor banekha*. *Bekhor banekha* translates to your firstborn son. If you're not sure what *milei'atekha* and *dim'akha* are, you're in good company. Neither do I. Contextually, these refer to agricultural products, but what these terms refer to exactly is quite unclear. And every commentator has their own spin.

The Degel Maḥaneh Efrayim's interpretation is a departure from reading these terms agriculturally. Instead, he chooses to read these terms in a somewhat hyper-literal way which ultimately point to a spiritual meaning. He understands *milei'atekha* as coming from the word "*malei*" meaning full. *Milei'atekha* is then the fullness of your ambitions, both spiritual and physical. More striking is his translation of *dim'akha* as your tears, from the word *dim'ah*. On his reading, God is not asking for the best of your crops or the first of your produce, He is asking for the best of your efforts and the fullness of your experience. Including, specifically, your tears.

The inclusion of tears as something that needs to be brought to God is a subtle and significant teaching. It is a beautiful and natural extension of what it means to bring your full effort to God. Tears are often a response of exertion and often come when we have worked so hard yet



feel that we have ultimately failed. In demanding that we bring these tears of disappointment to God as well, the Degel Maḥaneh Efrayim is extending, if not upending, the plain meaning of the verse. The verse asks for you to bring your triumphs, your first fruits, your finest produce, the fruit of your womb. The Degel Maḥaneh Efrayim asks you to bring everything: your failed tomato plant, your lost job, the baby that you couldn't conceive or who didn't survive. Our lives are not just a series of victories and celebrations. And our lives would be spiritually impoverished if we thought that we could only bring God our shining accomplishments. The Degel Maḥaneh Efrayim teaches that not only may you bring your tears to God, you must.

But this is also something deeply significant here in the personal dimension. There is a tendency, which is either learned or ingrained, to be ashamed of crying. Even when we are crying for a "legitimate reason" we might try to do so in private, hide our faces. We often find ourselves apologizing profusely for our tears. But what if our tears are something to be proud of and we've been acting ashamed of them? Maybe, no less than our first fruits, our tears need to be paraded proudly before our children, our parents and partners, witnessed by our friends, colleagues, or even strangers. Maybe our tears testify that we are capable of feeling things deeply and that's something to be valued. Maybe our tears teach others that we're not as tough as they think we are, that no one is, and we need to treat each other delicately.

Just as we are often moved to tears, tears themselves are moving. If they are good enough for God, they are good enough for us. Let's learn to value them.



Degel Mahaneh Efrayim - Mishpatim	דגל מחנה אפרים - משפטים
You shall not delay your <i>milei'atekha</i> and <i>dim'akha</i>... The path that you want to fulfill and draw out, whether in physical or spiritual matters, that is the meaning of <i>milei'atekha</i>. And <i>dim'akha</i> are the tears that you cry. You shall not delay (<i>te'aheir</i>)... Do not bring them to another god (<i>aheir</i>), God forbid. Rather give Me your firstborn meaning that if you drew your fullness (<i>milei'atekha</i>) to a place that was unnecessary then there is a rectification through tears, as is known. And you should never bring your tears to another, rather give them to Me. And spiritually speaking, children represent <i>mitzvot</i> which at their beginning and first steps should not have any foreign thoughts, God forbid, just give them to Me, for My name.	מלאתך ודמעך לא תאחר פי' הדרך אשר אתה רוצה למלאות ולהמשיך אותן הן בגשמיות והן ברחניות וזהו מלאתך. ודמעך הן הדמעות שאתה בוכה לא תאחר לא תבוא אותן לאל אחר ח"ו. רק בכור בניך תתן לי פי' אם ח"ו אתה המשכת מלאתך למקום שאינו צריך אזי יש לו תקנה בדמעה כידוע אז ודמעך עכ"פ לא תאחר רק תתן לי. וברוחניות הבנים הם המצות ראשיתן ותחלתן שלא יהיה בהם מחשבה זרה ח"ו רק תתן לי לשמי והבן:

