



by Rabbi Dr Raymond Apple z"l

A Time to Weep

Avraham came to mourn for Sara and to weep for her (B'reishit 23:2).

The patriarch's heart was torn, and he gave way to weeping.

There is a lot of weeping in the Bible. There is a time to weep, says Kohelet (3:4).

Cruden's Concordance, first published in 1737, says, "The ancient Hebrews wept, and made their trouble to appear openly, in mourning and affliction. They were not of the opinion that courage and greatness of soul consisted in seeming to be insensible in adversity, or in restraining their tears. It was even looked upon as a great disrespect for any one not to be bewailed at his funeral..."

Yet go back to Kohelet. There is a time to weep, so there must be a time not to weep. There are Biblical verses which actually command people not to weep.

Many a time Israel is asked, "Why are you weeping?" Rachel, the embodiment of Jewish motherhood, is told, "Hold back your voice from weeping" (Yirmiyahu 31:15).

It is natural to weep at tragedy, but there are times to move on from weeping.

Weeping isn't enough when there are things that can be done to ameliorate a situation. When there is an injustice, one should not just cry, but cry out and try to support the victim.

When someone has died, sympathy requires not mere weeping but practical help for the family. When one is in distress, one may start with a good cry but should then quietly ask, "Is there a way out of the problem?"

Even a Rachel who is weeping for her children can be urged towards faith and hope.

Yes, my Lord

When dealing with the Hittites concerning the purchase of Machpelah, Avraham is called by them "My lord", ADONI (23:6,11,15 et al).

He, on the other hand, does not call Efron or any Hittite "My lord".

It cannot be that the patriarch lacks good manners. As far as he is concerned, there is only one "Lord" - the Almighty.

He (Avraham) is, in fact, the first human being to call God "Lord"; the

Hebrew may come from a root that means firm, strong or powerful, and some dictionaries even link it with DIN - law.

Whatever title ("prince", etc.) he uses for human beings, it must not compete with the name which indicates God's Lordship.

There are militant anti-masculinists today who will go to any lengths in order not to use the term "Lord" for God, because "Lord" is a masculine term and they are determined to de-genderise the Bible and prayer book... and God too.

The fact is that when we use traditional terminology we know exactly what we are doing. We do not call HaShem by a masculine name in order to claim that the Creator is a male as against a female; we are using a classical text which is written in classical language.

We recognise that some writers refer to a feminine side of God, but when the militant modernists think this entitles them to speak of the Deity as "She" they are only confusing the issue. -OZ

Y'HI ZICHRO BARUCH