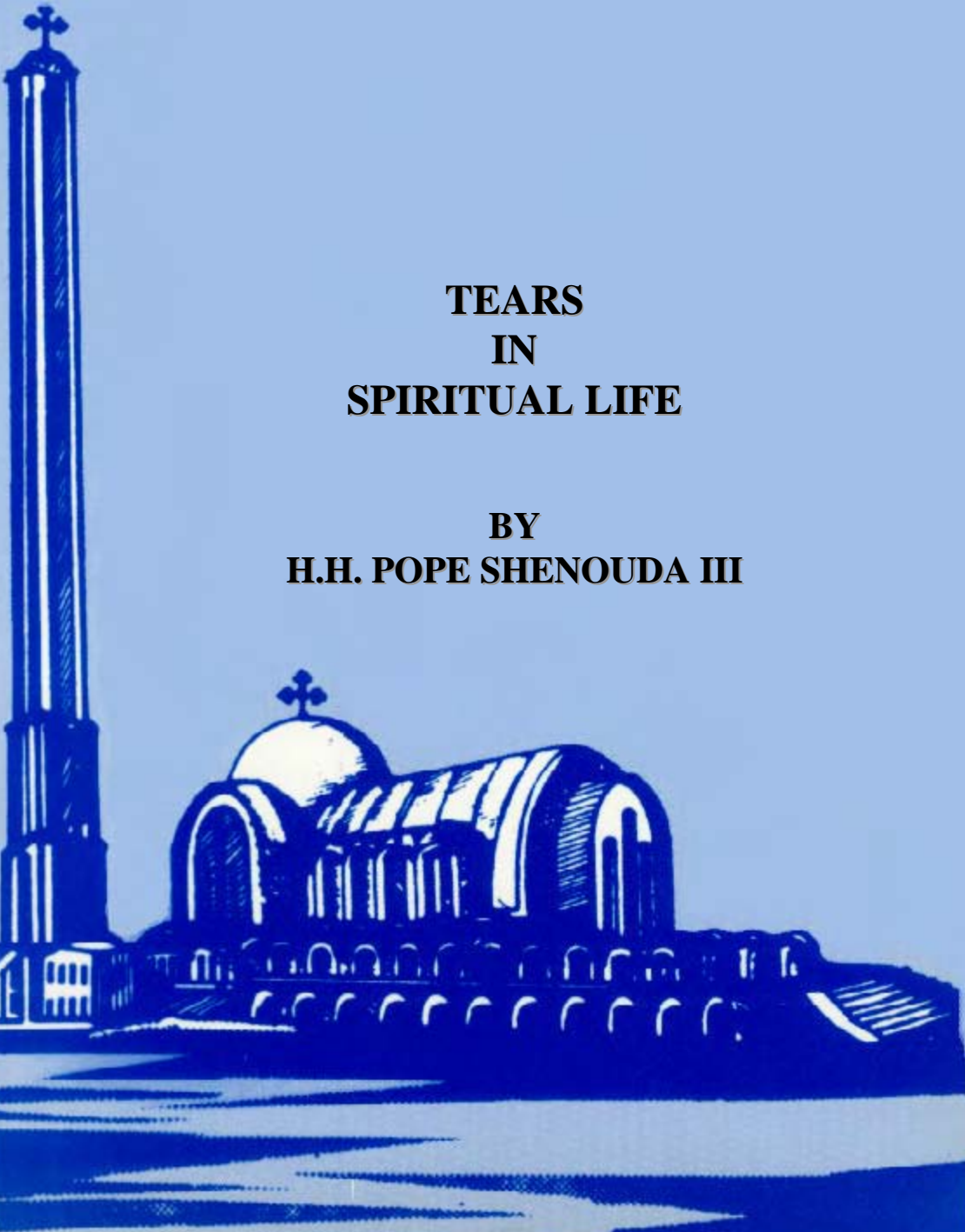


**TEARS
IN
SPIRITUAL LIFE**

**BY
H.H. POPE SHENOUDA III**





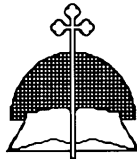
**COPTIC ORTHODOX
PATRIARCHATE**



See of St. Mark

**TEARS
IN
SPIRITUAL LIFE**

**BY
H.H. POPE SHENOUDA III**
Translated Into English By H. G. Bishop Suriel



C.O.P.T.

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*H.H. Pope Shenouda III, 117th Pope of
Alexandria and the See of St. Mark*



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The Story Of This Book (Preface)

The story of this book goes back thirty years. This was in 1960, when I was in my cave in the 'Bahr el Faregh' in the wilderness of Scetis. I had time to answer spiritual questions which my spiritual sons used to send to me.

Once I received a letter that contained many questions, I answered more than ten of them, and this topic remained. So I said to the person who send the letter, 'I have answered all your questions except the question on tears. I will soon answer this question for you...'

I prepared the points specific to tears and I kept them with me. I was then ordained a bishop and I gave a lecture about tears in 1964. Finally, I have found all the notes on this subject and wished to publish them before they are lost amongst my many papers.

Pope Shenouda III

June 1990



The Pinnacle Of Tears

The loftiest picture of tears is the saying of the Bible in the story of the raising of Lazarus from death: “*Jesus wept.*” (John 11:35)

It is the shortest verse in the Bible, but perhaps at the same time it is one of the most deepest verses in the Bible. Perhaps a similar one to it in its effect is:

The weeping of the Lord Jesus Christ over Jerusalem (Luke 19:41)

They are tears which are deeper than all of our contemplation. They contain love, impact, gentleness and sensitivity of heart, compassion and perhaps also grief.

They contain other meanings which I do not know...

Who can reach their depths?

The Beatification Of Weeping

✠ The Lord Jesus Christ beatified weeping.

He said, *“Blessed are you who weep now, for you shall laugh.”* (Luke 6:21) *“Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.”* (Matt 5:4)

✠ Psalm 126:5 says:

“Those who sow in tears shall reap in joy.”

✠ Solomon’s book of Ecclesiastes says,

“It is better to go to the house of mourning than to go to the house of feasting...The heart of the wise is in the house of mourning, but the heart of fools is in the house of mirth.” (Eccl 7:2, 4), It also says: *“Sorrow is better than laughter, for by a sad countenance the heart is made better”*. (Eccl 7:3)

Here we can point out that the Church calls us to weep over our sins everyday, in the second service of the “Midnight Prayer, where it says: **“Give me, Lord, fountains of many tears as you did in the past to the sinful woman”** and “Make me worthy to shed my tears on your feet, which took me to the right path and offer you the best of perfumes. Grant me to live pure and repentant...”

In this way the Church places in front of us the Gospel of the sinful woman (Luke 7), to pray everyday at midnight, and to learn a lesson from her tears and repentance. Each one of us will stand to pray in front of God and say: “Give me, Lord, fountains of many tears to weep over my pride, anger, harshness, impurity, negligence and over the many sins of my tongue, heart and mind. Also, for my lack of love of your people, for my lack of seriousness in my spirituality, and for my carelessness in keeping your laws. Give me also fountains of many tears to weep for my lack of love.”

God asks us to weep regularly and says to us in the Book of the Prophet Joe: “*Turn to me with all your heart, with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning.*” (Joel 2:12)

In the Book of Malachi the Prophet He says: “*...You cover the altar of the LORD with tears, with weeping and crying.*” (Mal 2:13)

We are in need of these tears as long as we are on earth, it is sufficient that the Lord Jesus Christ said in His beatitudes, “*Blessed are you who weep now...*” (Luke 6:21), and the word (now) means here on earth and the phrase “*for they shall be comforted*” means there, in heaven.

Hence, amongst the fruits of tears is comfort.

CHAPTER ONE

Types Of Weeping

- ✦ Tears of Prayer
- ✦ Tears of repentance and tears of regret
- ✦ Tears of despair
- ✦ Tears of sympathy for others or tears of existential sharing
- ✦ Tears of separation in the cases of death or at farewelling someone
- ✦ Tears of assembling together after separation
- ✦ Tears of inability or defeat
- ✦ Tears of impact, sensitivity, intense emotion
- ✦ Tears of grief, sorrow and loss
- ✦ Tears in ministry
- ✦ Tears of love and joy
- ✦ Tears of lust
- ✦ False tears

There are many types of tears in the life of mankind which differ according to their reasons. Amongst these types we can mention the following:

1. Tears of Prayer
2. Tears of repentance and tears of grief
3. Tears of despair
4. Tears of sympathy for others or tears of existential sharing

5. Tears of separation in the cases of death or at farewelling someone
6. Tears of assembling together after separation
7. Tears of inability or defeat
8. Tears of impact, sensitivity, intense emotion
9. Tears of grief, sorrow and loss
10. Tears in ministry
11. Tears of love and joy
12. Tears of lust
13. False tears

Tears of Prayer

The tears of prayer are many in the Holy Bible and in the stories of the saints, which we will mention when we discuss in detail the tears of the saints.

It is the result of love, feeling and the depth of prayer that originates from the heart, with feelings of longing and compassion towards God, or depth in requesting.

One of the most famous is the tears of David the Prophet who said to the Lord in his Psalms, listen to my tears (Ps 119).

Another example is the tears of Hannah the wife of Elkanah. It is mentioned about her prayer that she, “...*prayed to the Lord and wept in anguish. Then she made a vow..*” (1 Sam 1:10,11).

The examples of tears are very great in the Holy Bible, and in the stories of the saints also (See Chapter Three).

Tears of Regret and Repentance

Here are some examples from the Bible:

1. **The tears of the sinful woman who washed the feet of Jesus with her tears (Luke 7:38).**

She washed His feet with her tears and wiped them with the hair of her head. The Lord Jesus Christ said about her that, “*she has washed My feet with her tears*”, she loved much and was forgiven much. The Lord preferred her rather than the Pharisee who sensed his righteousness.

She did not have any words to say, or dare to say, so she spoke with her tears.

The person who is conscious and regrets his sins, is ashamed to talk. The feelings of regret and grief in his heart, press upon the fountains of tears in his eyes and so he weeps. His weeping is then the most sincere expression, better than any words.

A person might say some words without any feelings, but weeping is feelings without words.

They are expressive and sincere feelings.



Amongst the examples of tears is also repentance:

2. The tears of David the Prophet during his repentance:

It is at its deepest in his saying, *“I am weary with my groaning; All night I make my bed swim; I drench my couch with my tears.”* (Ps 6:6)

He also says, *“... I wept and chastened my soul with fasting... I also made sackcloth my garment.”* (Ps 69: 10, 11)
“Because of the sound of my groaning my bones cling to my skin...For I have eaten ashes like bread, and mingled my drink with weeping.” (Ps 102:5,9)



Perhaps one of the prominent examples of tears of regret and repentance is:

3. The tears of Peter the apostle after his denial:

The Bible says about him that, *“he went out and wept bitterly.”*(Matt 26:75).

Here we find weeping accompanied by bitterness in the heart and in tears.



Amongst the examples of tears of repentance is:

4. The tears of a whole race in a general repentance:

Joel the Prophet says about this:

“ Now, therefore,” says the LORD, “Turn to me with all your heart, with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning.” So rend your heart, and not your garments; return to the LORD your God”

“Let the priests, who minister to the LORD, weep between the porch and the altar; let them say, “Spare Your people, O LORD, and do not give Your heritage to reproach.” (Joel 2:12,13,17)

The whole race wept greatly in the days of Ezra the priest as a result of their sins, *“Now while Ezra was praying, and while he was confessing, weeping, and bowing down before the house of God” (Ezra 10:1).*



Similarly, Saint Paul the apostle says rebukingly to the Corinthians, “And you are puffed up, and have not rather mourned, that he who has done this deed might be taken away from among you” (1 Corinthians 5:2).

Saint James the apostle says: *“Cleanse your hands, you sinners ... Lament and mourn and weep!” (James 4:8,9)*

Malachi the prophet explains this matter saying, *“...you cover the altar of the LORD with tears, with weeping and crying”.* (Mal 2:13).



One of the examples of weeping as a result of sin is:

The weeping of those who pierced Christ, when they see Him in His Second Coming. About this the book of Revelation says, “*Behold, He is coming with clouds, and every eye will see Him, and they also who pierced Him. And all the tribes of the earth will mourn because of Him*” (Rev 1:7).

We cannot place mourning in this example under the heading of repentance, nor can it be described as regret also. Perhaps they are the tears of sorrow, pain and grief with no hope.



Tears of Sorrow

Perhaps the most prominent examples in the Bible are:

The tears of sorrow for the sinners who perished or were rejected by the Lord.

An example of this is the prophet Samuel’s weeping over king Saul. The Bible says, “*Samuel mourned for Saul*” (1 Samuel 15:35), “*Then the LORD said to Samuel, “How long will you mourn for Saul, seeing I have rejected him?”*” (1 Sam 16:1).

In like manner, Paul the apostle wept over the ministers who fell and perished. He said, “*For many walk, of whom I have told you often, and now tell you even weeping,*

that they are the enemies of the cross of Christ: whose end is destruction” (Phil 3:18, 19).

The book of Revelation mentions the weeping over Babylon, the mighty, sinful city: It says, *“And the kings of the earth who committed fornication and lived luxuriously with her will weep and lament for her, when they see the smoke of her burning, standing at a distance for fear of her torment, saying, “Alas, alas”.* (Rev 18:9,10).



Perhaps we might also remember David’s weeping over Absalom?!

Truly he was sorrowful over his son who had died, but there is a sensitive point which is, at death he perished. He died being a betrayer of his father, rebelling and fighting against him and committing fornication with his women.

David did not weep over his son whom the wife of Uriah gave birth to and he said, *“Can I bring him back again? I shall go to him, but he shall not return to me”* (2 Samuel 12:23), but he wept over Absalom.

At death he perished and his father did not go to him, but was separated from him forever.



Another example of weeping as a result of grief was the weeping of David and all the people when the Amalekites

invaded the city of Ziklag, burned it and took captive the women. Here the Bible says: *“Then David and the people who were with him lifted up their voices and wept, until they had no more power to weep”*. (1 Sam 30:1-4).

Truly it is a very moving situation, where the weeping reached its utmost limit that they had no power remaining to weep.



One more example of sorrowful weeping is, all the Book of ‘Lamentations’.

It is the book of weeping and tears. It enters into sorrowful weeping, but it is sorrow as a result of the ministry, and with a drive of holy zeal. This book is also suitable for a person to use to lament over himself .

Tears of Separation

It is not easy for hearts that have been joined with love to be separated, especially if the separation is without return, at least on this earth.

Hence, in this field we find examples of saints who wept as a result of this separation, amongst these examples are:

✠ The weeping of our father Abraham over Sarah:

The Bible, after the death of Sarah says, “*Abraham came to weep for Sarah and to weep for her*” (Gen 23:2).

✠ Likewise, it was said about Mary, the sister of Lazarus, after his death:

It was said about her “*She is going to the tomb to weep there*”. (John 11:31).

✠ Mary Magdalene wept at the tomb of our Lord Jesus Christ:

It was said about her, “*But Mary stood outside by the tomb weeping*” (John 20:11). The two angels said to her, “*Woman, why are you weeping?*”. The same phrase was said to her by the Lord Jesus Christ (John 20:13, 15).“

✠ The widow of Nain wept over her dead son:

It was said about her “*When the Lord saw her, He had compassion on her and said to her, “Do not weep”*”. (Luke 7:13)



✠ **The whole congregation wept when Saint Paul said to them, “(you) will see my face no more”.**

The book of ‘Acts’ says, “*Then they all wept freely, and fell on Paul’s neck and kissed him, sorrowing most of all for the words which he spoke, that they would see his face no more*”. (Acts 20:37, 38).



✠ **The weeping of the people after the death of Moses:**

The Bible says, “*And the children of Israel wept for Moses in the plains of Moab thirty days. So the days of weeping and mourning for Moses ended*” (Deut 34:8).



After saying all of these things I am amazed at some of the priests, deacons and other responsible persons who rebuke women severely when they weep at funerals!!

This weeping is something natural, they are human feelings which are difficult to conceal. However, they must be within reasonable limits, and should not turn into constant screaming which delays the prayers in the church.



Tears of Emotion

This appears to be very clear in the reunion of the upright Joseph with his brothers and his father, after years of separation.

✚ When Joseph heard his brothers saying to each other, “*We are truly guilty concerning our brother, for we saw the anguish of his soul when he pleaded with us, and we would not hear*”, the Bible then says about Joseph, “*he turned himself away from them and wept*”. (Gen 42:24).

✚ Likewise, when he revealed himself to them, the Bible says about him that, “*he cried out, “Make everyone go out from me!” So no one stood with him while Joseph made himself known to his brothers. And he wept aloud ... Then Joseph said to his brothers, “I am Joseph; does my father still live?”* (Gen 45:1-3).

✚ Similarly, when he met his brother Benjamin, the Bible says: “*Then he fell on his brother Benjamin's neck and wept, and Benjamin wept on his neck. Moreover he kissed all his brothers and wept over them.*” (Gen 45:14,15)

✚ The reunion of the upright Joseph with his father Jacob was with the same emotion and weeping. The Bible says, “*So Joseph made ready his chariot and went up to Goshen to meet*

his father Israel; and he presented himself to him, and fell on his neck and wept on his neck a good while” (Gen 46:29).

They are sensitive, human feelings.

✚ Perhaps using the same human measure, we might remember the meeting of Jacob with his cousin Rachel.

The Bible says, “*Then Jacob kissed Rachel, and lifted up his voice and wept. And Jacob told Rachel that he was her father’s relative and that he was Rebekah’s son” (Gen 29:11, 12).*

He was affected that the Lord assisted him in finding his uncle’s house, and that he found his cousin in front of him by divine arrangement. So, he lifted up his voice and wept.

They are human feelings, by which a person may weep, being affected in the case of reunion, and also in the case of separation.



Tears of Sharing

They are tears for the sake of others, or with others. The apostle says about this, “*weep with those who weep” (Romans 12:15).*

For this type also there are many examples in the Holy Bible, amongst which is the saying of Saint John the Evangelist:

✠ “*And many of the Jews had joined the women around Martha and Mary, to comfort them concerning their brother.*” (John 11:19). Perhaps the most distinguished and deepest thing which was said on this occasion was, “...when Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who came with her weeping” ...

✠ “*Jesus wept*” (John 11:35).

✠ Perhaps another example in this field is the weeping of daughters of Jerusalem when they saw the Lord Jesus being delivered to the cross, where, “*a great multitude of the people followed Him, and women who also mourned and lamented Him*” (Luke 23:27).

✠ One more example also is the weeping of mothers over their sons in any hardship.

When the water was used up by Hagar and her son, she placed the boy under one of the shrubs. Then she went and sat down across from him at a distance...for she said to herself, “*Let me not see the death of the boy ... and lifted her voice and wept*” (Gen 21:15, 16).

Tears of Joy

An example of this is the weeping of the people at the rebuilding of the temple after the captivity in the days of Zerubbabel. The book of ‘Ezra’ the priest says:

“But many of the priests and Levites and heads of the fathers’ houses, who were old men, who had seen the first temple, wept with a loud voice when the foundation of this temple was laid before their eyes; yet many shouted aloud for joy, so that the people could not discern the noise of the shout of joy from the noise of the weeping of the people.” (Ezra 3:12, 13)

Rejected Tears

Amongst this group are the tears of despair:

✠ Perhaps an example of this is the tears of Esau of which the apostle said, *“lest there be any fornicator or profane person like Esau, who for one morsel of food sold his birthright. For you know that afterward, when he wanted to inherit the blessing, he was rejected, for he found no place for repentance, though he sought it diligently with tears”* (Heb 12:16, 17).



Esau's tears were of another type.

✚ They were tears of inability and defeat. They were tears of wrath and malice towards his brother, and tears of despair in not receiving the blessing.

“And Esau said to his father, “Have you only one blessing, my father? Bless me, even me also, O my father!” And Esau lifted up his voice and wept.” (Gen 27:38) It was said that when he heard of the blessing of Jacob, *“he cried with an exceedingly great and bitter cry”* (Gen 27:34).

The greater blessing which Jacob attained was that the Lord Jesus Christ would come from his seed, and with his seed all the families of the earth would be blessed (Gen 28:14). It was not possible for Christ to come forth from Esau and Jacob together.

Hence, the phrase, *“Have you only one blessing, my father?”*, means with respect to this matter a complete ignorance of the blessing and its nature! His cry was a cry of wrath and defeat, and his weeping was a weeping of inability and despair.



Another example also of this rejected weeping of despair is:

✚ The weeping of those who will perish in eternity.

The Bible says about them that they, “*will be cast out into outer darkness. There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth*” (Matt 8:12). It also says about the end of the world, “*The Son of Man will send out His angels, and they will gather out of His kingdom all things that offend, and those who practice lawlessness, and will cast them into the furnace of fire. There will be wailing and gnashing of teeth*”. (Matt 13:41, 42) The same words are repeated in (Matt 24:51) and in (Luke 13:28). So, what profit is such weeping?!

Tears of Lust

They are tears which add a new sin to the sin of lust, and so it becomes a compounded sin.

An example of this is the sin of the people when they wept in the wilderness craving to eat meat!!

The Book of Numbers says:

“Now the mixed multitude who were among them yielded to intense craving; so the children of Israel also wept again and said: “Who will give us meat to eat? We remember the fish which we ate freely in Egypt, the cucumbers, the melons, the leeks, the onions, and the garlic”. (Num 11:4, 5). Moses said to the Lord, “Where am I to get meat to give to all these people? For they weep all over me, saying, “Give us meat, that we may eat”. (Num 11:13).





CHAPTER TWO

TEARS IN THE MINISTRY

✧ The Reasons for tears in the ministry

1. Perhaps the most famous are the tears of Jeremiah the Prophet. These were recorded in a whole book amongst the holy books of the Bible called, ‘The Book of Lamentations’.

It contains many prayers of sighing and grief. Jeremiah says, *“Remember, O LORD, what has come upon us; look, and behold our reproach! Our inheritance has been turned over to aliens ... We have become orphans and waifs, our mothers are like widows”*. (Lam 5:1-3).

He also says, *“The joy of our heart has ceased; Our dance has turned into mourning...Because of this our heart is faint; Because of these things our eyes grow dim...Why do You forget us forever, and forsake us for so long a time? Turn us back to You, O LORD, and we will be restored; renew our days as of old, unless You have utterly rejected us”* (Lam 5:15-22).

He explains in this book, the weeping of the kingdom of Judah saying, *“For these things I weep; my eye, my eye overflows with water; because the comforter, who should restore my life, is far from me”* (Lam 1:16). *“My eyes fail with tears, my heart is troubled.”* (Lam 2:11) . *“My eyes flow and do not cease, without interruption, till the LORD from heaven*

looks down and sees. My eyes bring suffering to my soul because of all the daughters of my city.” (Lam 3:49-51)

Weeping here is without refrain, and without comfort up until the eye has become tired of weeping, with feelings that God has forsaken the soul or forgot or rejected it! Prayer follows prayer for Him to return.



2. Another example is that of the captives by the Rivers of Babylon. The Psalmist says: *“By the rivers of Babylon, There we sat down, yea, we wept When we remembered Zion. We hung our harps Upon the willows in the midst of it. For there those who carried us away captive required of us a song ... How shall we sing the Lord's song In a foreign land?”* (Ps 137)



3. The weeping of Nehemiah at hearing bad news about Jerusalem is also an example.

He said, *“...when I heard these words, that I sat down and wept, and mourned for many days; I was fasting and praying before the God of heaven”* (Neh 1:4).

In his prayer he confessed his sins and the sins of all the people and he asked for mercy from the Lord, reminding Him of His promises to the fathers.



4. It is the same situation with respect to Ezra the priest, when he found out about the sins of the people. He wept and made the people weep with him.

The Bible says, *“Now while Ezra was praying, and while he was confessing, weeping, and bowing down before the house of God, a very large congregation of men, women, and children assembled to him from Israel; for the people wept very bitterly”*. (Ezra 10:1).



Other than in ‘Lamentations’, Jeremiah the prophet says in his book, ‘Jeremiah’: *“Oh, that my head were waters, and my eyes a fountain of tears, that I might weep day and night for the slain of the daughter of my people!”* (Jer 9:1)



5. Daniel the prophet also wept concerning the years of captivity:

He said about this, *“Then I set my face toward the Lord God to make request by prayer and supplications, with fasting, sackcloth, and ashes. And I prayed to the LORD my God, and made confession, and said ... “we have sinned and committed iniquity, we have done wickedly and rebelled, even by departing from Your precepts and Your judgments”*. (Dan 9:3-5).

“In those days I, Daniel, was mourning three full weeks. I ate no pleasant food, no meat or wine came into my mouth, nor

did I anoint myself at all, till three whole weeks were fulfilled.”
(Dan 10:2,3)

Here we can see weeping accompanied by prayer, fasting, renunciation and confession of sins.



6. One of the examples of weeping in the ministry is the weeping of Micah the Prophet, *“All this is for the transgression of Jacob and for the sins of the house of Israel.”* (Mic 1:5)

He says about this, *“Therefore I will wail and howl, I will go stripped and naked; I will make a wailing like the jackals and a mourning like the ostriches, for her wounds are incurable. For it has come to Judah...”* (Mic 1:8, 9).



7. Perhaps the pinnacle of weeping in the ministry is the weeping of our Lord Jesus Christ over Jerusalem:

The Scriptures say, *“Now as He drew near, He saw the city and wept over it, saying, ... “For the days will come upon you when your enemies will build an embankment around you ... and level you, and your children within you, to the ground; and they will not leave in you one stone upon another ...”* (Luke 19:41-44).



8. Saint Paul the apostle also wept whilst in the ministry:

He says to the priests of Ephesus, *“You know, from the first day that I came to Asia, in what manner I always lived among you, serving the Lord with all humility, with many tears and trials which happened to me by the plotting of the Jews”* (Acts 20:18,19).

“Therefore watch, and remember that for three years I did not cease to warn everyone night and day with tears.” (Acts 20:31)

Even in his Epistles he says to the people of Corinth, *“For out of much affliction and anguish of heart I wrote to you, with many tears, not that you should be grieved, but that you might know the love which I have so abundantly for you”* (2 Cor 2:4).



9. In like manner were the disciples of Saint Paul in their weeping.

Saint Paul writes to his disciple Timothy saying, *“... as without ceasing I remember you in my prayers night and day, greatly desiring to see you, being mindful of your tears ...”* (2 Tim1:4).



The Reasons for Weeping in the Ministry

- ✧ The sensitive heart is affected by the state of the people being served.
- ✧ He is affected if he remembers their sins. How they became weak and how they hurt the heart of God.
- ✧ He is affected by the results of sin and what troubles and curses it has brought, or what it will bring in the way of God's wrath.
- ✧ He is affected in rebuking someone for sin, remembering his own weakness also and that he did not wish to rebuke, and so he looks on with tears.
- ✧ A person weeps whilst serving, asking for God's help or asking for His mercy and forgiveness. He might weep whilst presenting to God in his prayers, the level of loss the matter has reached.
- ✧ A person weeps whilst serving, feeling his weakness, beseeching God to intervene, because the matters cannot be solved without Him.
- ✧ He might weep due to the severity of the problems, and because of the pressure of the Evil One against him, or because of the gloating and rebuke of the enemies. As David the prophet said, *"My tears have been my food day and night, while they continually say to me, "Where is your God?" When I remember these things, I pour out my soul within me ..."* (Ps42:3, 4).

CHAPTER THREE

TEARS IN THE LIFE OF THE SAINTS

1. Saint Arsenius is one of the saints who became very famous for his weeping.

It is said that his eyelashes fell due to the intensity of his weeping, and that two cavities formed on his cheeks because of his weeping. During summer he would wet the palm leaves with his tears, and he placed a piece of cloth on his knees for his tears to fall on.

At the time of his death he wept intensely and his disciples said to him, “Truly, Father, are you also afraid?” “Indeed,” he answered them, “the fear which is mine at this hour has been with me ever since I became a monk.”

If the great Saint Arsenius wept like this, then what can we say about ourselves?

What can we say about the fear of this hour that accompanied him? Who did it accompany? It accompanied the great Arsenius, the model of solitude and silence in “The Paradise of the Fathers”, whom Pope Theophilus desired to meet. The saints used to say to him, “Why do you avoid us?” He replied, “God knows that I love you, but I cannot live with God and with men”.

Arsenius the great was the one who stood for prayer at sunset, the sun being behind him and remained standing to pray until sunrise the next day, spending the whole night in prayer.

The humble Arsenius, the tutor of princes, was the one who consulted an Egyptian peasant and said, “I have indeed been taught Latin and Greek, but I do not know even the Alpha Veta which this Egyptian knows, and I do not know even how to pick beans with the monks of Scetis”.

What sin did Saint Arsenius commit , to weep and fear this hour?

After all of this, do we hurry towards comfort and joy at beginning of the path and boast that our sins have been forgiven? We then search for gifts? We ask for our share in the inheritance? We then forget ourselves!

Tears need contrition of heart. It is also very suitable here for a person to know himself, to account for it and blame it.

It is said that at the time of the death of Saint Arsenius, Pope Theophilus said, “Truly you are blessed, Abba Arsenius, for you wept all your life for the sake of this hour”.



2. When Abba Poemen heard that Saint Arsenius was dead, he said weeping, “Truly you are blessed, Abba Arsenius, for you wept for yourself in this world!”

“He who does not weep for himself here, below, will weep eternally hereafter; so it is impossible not to weep, either voluntarily or when compelled through suffering.”

David the prophet who experienced tears very well in his life was right in saying, *“Those who sow in tears shall reap in joy”* (Ps 126:5).



3. One of the most famous examples on tears also, is Saint Isidore, the priest of the cells.

There were three thousand monks under his supervision whom he used to supervise. The devils feared and escaped from him and he easily drove them out.

Once, the devil appeared to him saying, “Is it not enough for you that we cannot even pass by your cell, nor by the cells that are next to your cell? We had one brother here in the wilderness whom you made to attack us with his prayers day and night”.

Despite all of this, Saint Isidore used to weep having abundant tears.

He used to burst into tears with a loud voice, to the level that his disciple in the adjacent room heard him weeping, and so he entered unto him saying, “Why are you weeping my father?” The saint replied, “I am weeping for my sins, my son”. The disciple then said, “Even you, our father, have sins to weep for?” He answered, “Believe me my son, if God revealed to me all of my sins, it would not be enough if three or four assembled with me to weep over them!”

These saints had great sensitivity, regarding sin as being very wrong and that it hurts God’s loving heart.

They did not think about the punishment for sin, but they thought about the feelings of God and that they had not pleased Him as yet, despite the great loftiness that they had reached in spiritual life. They see that this (short coming) when measured to the perfection they are aiming for, is the sin they are weeping over.



4. Another saint who wept was Saint Pachomius, the father of the Koinonia.

After his prayer, his disciples even found the ground where he stood to be wet with tears.



5. Saint Macarius the great was also known for his tears.

When the days of his departure came near, the fathers asked him to come to them to be blessed by him, before his passing away instead of all the dwellers of the mountain moving to come to him. When he came to them, they gathered around him and asked him for a word of benefit. The saint wept and said to him: **“Let us weep my brothers, with our eyes overflowing with tears before we go to the place where our tears will burn our bodies.”**

They all wept and fell on their faces saying, “Pray for us, O father”.



6. The following saints are also known for their tears:

Saint Paphnutius, the disciple and successor of saint Macarius the great:

He had developed in the life of holiness since his early youth, and all the fathers admired him and loved him, until he became the head of Scetis after Saint Macarius.

This saint recounted the following story to his children, saying: “When I was young, I found a cucumber that had fallen to the ground from the camel drivers, so I took it and ate it. Every time I remember this story, I weep.”

This happened when he was young, he then became a monk, developed in grace, became head of Scetis, he used to drive out demons and Pope Theophilus used to desire to listen to a word of benefit from him. Despite all of this, every time he remembered this story, he wept.

Weeping here is not in order for the Lord to forgive him a sin, for David the prophet wept after the Lord had forgiven him his sin.

This was after Nathan the prophet had said to him, “*The Lord also has put away your sin; you shall not die*”. (2 Sam 12:13).

The sensitive person does not only weep for the sake of asking for forgiveness. He weeps however, because he grieves over himself: How did he reach the level of falling, how did he grieve the Holy Spirit Who dwells in him and with all courage broke the commandments of the loving God, Who created him in His image and likeness and so he lost this image by his sins.



One of the saints was asked about the matters that would make him weep. He said, “There are three matters that I fear:

- (a) The moment my spirit departs from my body
- (b) The moment of standing in front of the Just Judge
- (c) The instant of the handing down of the judgment upon me.”

These three matters used to regularly occupy the minds of the saints, and was a source of tears with respect to them. They are matters concerned with a person’s caution over his eternity.

The remembrance of death then, is always accompanied by the remembrance of the Judgment.

The remembrance of the Judgment brings about tears, especially if it is accompanied by the remembrance of one’s sins and weeping over them. How difficult is the phrase, “(He) will render to each one according to his deeds”! Or the phrase, “and their works follow them”!

I wonder, of what type are these works which will follow us? Are they worthy of tears?

In remembering the Judgment, the person also remembers God’s justice. That is why the Church places in front of us this truth everyday in “The Prayer Before Sleeping”, in which the person praying says, “Behold, I am about to stand before the Just Judge in fear because of my numerous sins...”.

In remembering the Judgment and sin, we remember also the saying of the apostle: “*It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.*” (Heb 10:31)

Fear also, is one of the vital reasons for tears. We mean here, fear for spiritual reasons and not fear for the sake of worldly matters, as occurs to some people.



My brother, weep here, so that the Lord will wipe away every tear from your eyes at receiving it.

However, if you do not weep here, what will Christ wipe from your eyes in the Other World?

He who does not weep here, will have springs of tears of despair burst from his eyes which no one will wipe away, they are tears which are not able to extinguish the fire surrounding him.

Our fathers the saints said many things about weeping and tears.

✠ A brother asked Abba Poemen what he should do about his sins. The old man said to him, “He who wishes to purify his faults purifies them with tears, and he who wishes to acquire virtues, acquires them with tears; for weeping is the way the Scriptures and our Fathers give us when they say “Weep!” Truly, there is no other way than this.”

✠ Abba Noah asked Saint Macarius, “Tell me a word of benefit.” The old man said to him, “flee from men”. Abba Noah then asked him, “What do you mean my Father by fleeing from men?” The old man then said, “Stay in your cell and weep for your sins”.

✠ Saint John Saba said, “Blessed are those whose cheeks have been burned by the tears of Your love. For these tears water the articulate earth, which was burned with fire and so it produces the fruits of the Spirit”.

These tears are the ones which should depict each person in his life: They have factors which strengthen them, and factors which weaken them. What are each of these factors?



CHAPTER FOUR

THE REASONS FOR TEARS

- ✦ Gentleness and Sensitivity
- ✦ Sensing the Trifleness of the World
- ✦ The Remembrance of Sins
- ✦ Temptations and Hardships
- ✦ The Remembrance of Death
- ✦ Joy and Emotion
- ✦ Prayer
- ✦ Feeling of Incapability
- ✦ The Feeling of being Abandoned
- ✦ Gloating Over Another Person's Misfortune (Triumph)

There are many incentives that cause tears, some are from within; in the heart, thought, feelings and even in a person's nature itself, and some are external factors, related and associated with the situations that surround the person who is weeping. We will try to speak about each of these as much as possible. We can mention the following:

Gentleness and Sensitivity

The tears of a gentle and sensitive person are easy and close by.

The harsh person on the other hand, whose heart is strong, has precious tears and it is difficult for him to weep. If such a person weeps one day, then the external reason must be very strong and dangerous, so that the nature of this person could not overcome it.

That is why we find that a woman's tears are very close, more closer than a man's tears.

This is because women are more gentler than men by their nature. If a man weeps however, his tears are more deeper and greater in effect. Likewise, if a child or a young person weeps, this is something natural, it is something normal in his nature. If an older man weeps on the other hand, his tears are more precious and real, they have strong and deep reasons, since this older man could not control himself.

The gentle person is affected by the smallest thing, his tears run quickly and spontaneously.

They are natural tears which are not manufactured, since his sensitive feelings are affected speedily, whether in what concerns him or concerns someone else. There are many matters which shake the heart with respect to those who own gentle feelings, whereas these matters would not affect others who have stiff or harsh hearts, or those who have the power of dominance over their feelings or are cautious in hiding them.

Tears and harshness do not agree, except if the harsh person is hit with reasons greater than this harshness which makes him move from within and he collapses in front of it. This is exactly what happened to Esau, when he was shocked at the loss of the blessing by a trick from his brother. He could not bear the shock and so he lifted up his voice and wept (Gen 27:34, 38).

The weeping of a harsh person is something temporary. It is also something unnatural. The weeping of a gentle person however, is a natural matter, it is repeated, he tolerates the events at any time, whether for an internal or external reason.

That is why, the person who loves tears and desires to acquire them must first acquire the gentleness of nature.

If his senses are not gentle by nature, then he must acquire this gentleness, search for its reasons and train himself in it.

Naturally, the more a person comes closer to God, the more gentler his feelings become. The more he becomes acquainted with those whose nature is gentle, the more he will

learn gentleness from them. Hence, he must keep away from the reasons that lead to severity of nature and harshness of heart, and they are many.

Sensing the Trifleness of the World

From where will the virtue of weeping come to him who lives in the pleasures of the world and its amusements? The world occupies and amuses him.

Solomon the sage was enjoying the splendor of his reign and its grandeur, and whatever his eyes desired he did not keep from them (Ecclesiastes 2:10). At that time he did not weep, but when he sensed the trifleness of the world and that indeed all was vanity and grasping for the wind, he was then able to say: *“For by a sad countenance the heart is made better.”*

“It is better to go to the house of mourning than to go to the house of feasting, for that is the end of all men; and the living will take it to heart.” “The heart of the wise is in the house of mourning, but the heart of fools is in the house of mirth.” (Eccl 7:2-4)

When a person realizes the truth of matters and senses the trifleness of the world and does not delight in his desires, then he feels voidness with respect to the world and his feelings change.

He yearns for another world, and if he finds that the other world is far away from him, he weeps whilst yearning compassionately for it.

He feels alienation in this present world and the feelings of alienation make him weep. He is certain that his true joy is not here. For he is a stranger on earth, a guest like all of his forefathers, anticipating a heavenly homeland, the city which has foundations (Heb 11:16, 10).

The feelings of the Psalmist were correct when he called this world, “the Valley of Baca (Weeping)”.

About our lives in it he said, “*As they pass through the Valley of Baca*” (Ps 84:6).

The saints used to weep when they sensed their alienation in the world, yearning for a better world and renouncing all that is in it. The joys of this world did not satisfy or please them.

Truly, man comprehends spiritual tears when he reaches the life of renunciation.

When he arrives at renunciation, or at least to the love of renunciation, then he weeps over the days which he spent being attached to the trifles of the world and over his preoccupation with it. He says to the Lord as Saint Augustine said, “I have delayed too much in loving You, O You indescribable Beauty”.

Here, he remembers his sins, and its remembrance becomes a spring for many tears.



The Remembrance of Sins

Saint Peter the apostle did not comprehend exactly, the truth of what he did whilst cursing, blaspheming and denying Christ! However, when the rooster crowed and he felt the depth of his sin, “*he went out and wept bitterly*” (Matt 26:75).

The sinful woman did the same, she washed the Lord’s feet with her tears and wiped them with the hair of her head (Luke 7:38). Similarly, David the prophet wept when Nathan the prophet revealed to him the depth of his sin (2 Sam 12:7).

The forgetting of sin dries the heart and dries the eyes. David the prophet put it well when he said, “*my sin is ever before me*”. (Ps 51:3). I wish you would do this, letting your sins be in front of your eyes, humiliating and rebuking yourself by them and to weep over these sins day and night. Weeping over sins washes the heart, purifies the spirit and awakens the conscience and so it prohibits the person from returning to the sin another time and teaches him caution and precision.

There is an advice which is repeated in “The Paradise of the Fathers” that the fathers used to say to whoever sought a word of benefit: “**Sit in your cell and weep for your sins**”.

God’s forgiveness of sin does not prohibit the sinner from weeping over it. He does not weep, fearing the punishment, but he weeps because he has saddened God’s heart by his sins, he has saddened the Spirit of God that is within him. He has also distanced the angels surrounding him and revealed himself as evil in front of the spirits who have departed. He also weeps

because by his sin he has lost his divine image, he has fallen and been defiled.

He weeps in pain, how can his will have been weakened as such and his spirit defiled?

He feels ashamed in front of himself and embarrassed also. As David the prophet said in the psalm, “... *the shame of my face has covered me*” (Ps 44:15). Daniel the prophet also said whilst confessing the sins of the people, “*Lord, to us belongs shame of face, to our kings, our princes, and our fathers, because we have sinned against You*” (Dan 9:8, 7).

The saints likewise, used to weep for the sins of the people.

They weep in sadness for those who fall and perish, just as Samuel mourned for Saul the king (1 Sam 15:35). They wept whilst asking for forgiveness for the people, requesting grace for them to repent, as Ezra the priest wept as a result of the people’s sins and tore his garment and plucked out the hair of his head (Ezra 9:3). “...*Ezra was praying ... confessing, weeping, and bowing down before the house of God*” (Ezra 10:1) He said, “*my God: I am too ashamed and humiliated to lift up my face to You, my God; for our iniquities have risen higher than our heads, and our guilt has grown up to the heavens*” (Ezra 9:6).

The same thing happened to Nehemiah when he confessed the sins of the people and said, “*Both my father's house and I have sinned. We have acted very corruptly against You*” (Neh 1:6, 7).

Jeremiah the prophet also wept for the sake of the people: His tears and lamentations were recorded in a whole book of the Bible which we read regularly in the twelfth hour of Good Friday.

If the people do not weep for their sins, then it is the duty of the saints to weep for their sake, requesting mercy, forgiveness and repentance for them.

Lord Jesus Christ wept over Jerusalem (Luke 19:41), seeing its destruction in front of His eyes. Everyday we see those who fall and perish and those who stray and are distanced. Don't they deserve weeping from us? When Nehemiah heard that the wall of Jerusalem was broken down and its gates were burned with fire he said, *"So it was, when I heard these words, that I sat down and wept, and mourned for many days; I was fasting and praying..."* (Neh 1:3, 4).

Nehemiah wept in front of God whilst confessing the sins of the people. He said to the Lord in his prayer, *"Both my father's house and I have sinned. We have acted very corruptly against You, and have not kept the commandments, the statutes, nor the ordinances which You commanded Your servant Moses"* (Neh 1:6, 7).

When the daughters of Jerusalem wept over Lord Jesus Christ, He said to them, *"...do not weep for Me, but weep for yourselves and for your children"* (Luke 23:28). Indeed, these souls were in need of weeping, these sinful souls whom Christ wept for.

When we weep for our sins, we remember also, God's love which persevered with us all of this time!

We remember God's tolerance towards us and His forbearance, whilst we are continuing to do wrong for a long time. It reminds us of God's patient and tolerant love and this gives us a new reason for weeping, being affected by His compassionate treatment of us.

When the repentant soul weeps in front of God, He has compassion and is overcome by His compassion and says to this soul, "*Turn your eyes away from me, for they have overcome me*" (Song 6:5).

David the prophet is one of the most outstanding examples of weeping for sins.

His saying, "*All night I make my bed swim; I drench my couch with my tears*" (Ps 6) is sufficient. The phrase, "All (or every) night" indicates the regularity and the period of the weeping. The phrase, "I make my bed swim" indicates the amount of tears being shed. Imagine this great king, he returns to his palace at night, he removes his crown and royal clothing and kneels in front of God whilst weeping, to drench his couch with his tears. Even if he sleeps, he sleeps on a bed drenched with tears, despite all of the appearance of majesty and splendor that surrounds him. He also says: "*My tears have been my food day and night*" (Ps 42:3).

He also says in his humbleness and weeping, "*For I have eaten ashes like bread, And mingled my drink with weeping*" (Ps 102:9). That means that whenever he drank, his tears fell and mingled with the water that he drank and he drank them together!

David used to speak to God about these tears saying, “... *give ear to my cry; Do not be silent at my tears; For I am a stranger with You*” (Ps 39:12). “*Put my tears into Your bottle*”. (Ps 56:8).

Those who hurry towards joy, hamper their repentance and they lose the blessing of contrition and the comfort of tears.

They return to sin once again because repentance did not satisfy the demands of contrition and weeping and this hasty joy delayed the heart from the feelings of the bitterness and burden of sin and so they passed over it as if it was a simple matter.

When the repentant begins weeping and being humble in front of God, the devil fights him with the phrase: “*Restore to me the joy of Your Salvation*” (Ps 51).

Notice that David the Prophet presented it as a request, and did not know it as a way of life. There is no doubt that the joy of salvation will not be enjoyed except by he who realises the bitterness of sin and has wept bitterly, as Saint Peter the apostle did.

The Passover lamb represented the salvation from the slavery of Pharaoh, and symbolizes the sacrifice of Christ (1 Corinthians 5:7). Despite this, the Lord’s command was for them to eat it with bitter herbs (Exodus 12:8), remembering their sins which brought slavery upon them. Weeping then, is the means for comfort as the Bible said: “*Those who sow in tears shall reap in joy*” (Ps 126:5).

With these tears that you shed in front of God, you can obtain the joy of His salvation.

Temptations and Hardships

Temptations, hardships, pain, diseases and disasters sometimes bring about tears. **Especially if the person feels abandoned, or that it is a punishment as a result of his sins.** Here, a spiritual factor enters into weeping, its reason being that the person feels that grace has departed from him, or that God has begun to deliver him to the hands of his enemies. He is then grieved and weeps.

Sometimes he weeps, repenting and regretting, and sometimes he weeps whilst reproaching God.

Perhaps this is what David did in his temptations and hardships when he said in the Psalm, *“Why do You stand afar off, O LORD? Why do You hide Yourself in times of trouble?”* (Ps 10:1).

The Lord sometimes allows temptations, not in abandonment, but for its spiritual benefits.

For, a person at the time of humbleness finds this humbleness bringing him to the contrition of heart, meekness of spirit, an excess of tears that makes him feel his weakness, and removes from him all the reasons and manifestations of pride.

God might see that the tears of one of His sons has dried up in the pleasures of the world, and so He allows temptations and hardships to come to him, in order to squeeze his eyes, after it squeezes his heart.

God does not even prohibit these temptations from His saints. The Psalm says, “*Many are the afflictions of the righteous, But the LORD delivers him out of them all*” (Ps 34:19). He allows these afflictions to afflict His saints. If it arrives at spiritual results, He rescues them from these afflictions.

Here, I would like to differentiate between two types of temptation and two types of tears.

One type is worldly and the other is spiritual.

There are materialistic or worldly temptations that afflict a person through his wealth or fame or his position and so he weeps being grieved over the pleasures of the things he lost in this world. Perhaps in his weeping he grumbles and becomes discontent even towards God Himself! As if God was the reason for his affliction.

The tears of such a person is a sin.

We will not speak about this type. His tears indicate his love of the world and of the feelings therein, which will pass away and its lust with it (1 John 2:16, 17).

The person who renounces worldly pleasures is not affected by these matters, but says, “*The LORD gave, and the LORD has taken away; Blessed be the name of the LORD*” (Job 1:21).

Another person for example, the more temptations press him, he feels the trifleness of the world and desires a better world, this is a spiritual person.

If he weeps, in fear of grace abandoning him, or that he has grieved the Lord, and so He left him to the troubles of the world.

This person's weeping is spiritual and mingled with repentance and humbleness of heart, and also mingled with confession. He says in his heart: "*What has happened to me is far less than what I deserve as a result of my sins. It is good for me to fulfill the affliction on earth just like poor Lazarus*" (Luke 16:25).

He might say with the Psalmist, "*It is good for me that I have been afflicted, That I may learn Your statutes*" (Ps 119:71).

Such tears bring comfort to the heart, because God accepts them as a smell of joy in front of Him and also accepts their spiritual motivations.

The temptations might be from devilish warfares. The person weeps sensing his weakness and asking for assistance from the Lord.

The person's feeling that he is weaker than fighting this spiritual power brings him tears, fearing that he might fall. The thoughts of the enemy might have defiled the man of God and so he weeps, being cautious over the purity of his heart, thoughts and feelings and he struggles asking for God's grace to be with him.

On this spiritual war, Saint Paul the apostle sent a message rebuking the Hebrews and saying: "*You have not yet resisted to bloodshed, striving against sin*" (Heb 12:4).

Tears is an element in this struggle to bloodshed. He speaks to God saying: “*Listen to my tears*” (Ps 119) and do not abandon me “*because without You I can do nothing*”. (John 15:5).

There is another reason for tears, and that is:

The Remembrance of Death

The person who is preoccupied with the present life does not weep.

He says like the rich fool, “*I will pull down my barns and build greater, and there I will store all my crops and my goods. And I will say to my soul, “Soul, you have many goods laid up for many years; take your ease; eat, drink, and be merry”*”. (Luke 12: 18, 19).

The pleasures of the world distract him from his eternity and so he does not weep, but is joyful and having a good time!

As for the spiritual person, he places his eternity in front of him at all times, he understands that the Lord’s Day will come as a thief (Rev 16:15). You find him preparing for this eternity, with the life of repentance, struggle, the required perfection and holiness.

When he remembers death, he weeps because he is not ready for it.

There is still a long struggle ahead of him, of which he has not yet taken one step into. The great Arsenius, the man of solitude, silence and prayer used to weep at the remembrance of death.

If the spiritual person weeps at the remembrance of death in general, then how much more his weeping would be if death was expected, for a clear reason that was revealed to him?

Weeping in itself is not everything. Weeping is not for the reason of being separated from family and loved ones, or the pleasures of the world as worldly people and those who love the world do.

However, it is weeping accompanied by spiritual preparation, preparation for meeting God. Hence, the saints used to advise the remembrance of death and the visiting of cemeteries.

Saint Anthony was spiritually affected at the death of his father, he renounced the world and left it with his own will, before they would remove him from it reluctantly. A funeral procession which Saint Paul saw had its impact also, so he left the world, wealth and the lawsuits and became the first hermit.

Saint Macarius the great used to sometimes place a skull beneath his head, to remind him of death, and Saint Macarius of Alexandria visited one of the cemeteries. Whilst Saint Anthony the great at the beginning of his monastic life lived in a tomb.

The remembrance of death has its many benefits, and tears is one of them.

The remembrance of death makes man stand in front of his own reality, and remember that he is merely a vapor that appears for a little time and then vanishes away (James 4:14) and that he is, “*As a flower of the field, so he flourishes. For the wind passes over it, and it is gone, And its place remembers it no more*”. (Ps 103: 15, 16).

David the Prophet rightly said, He also said “*LORD, make me to know my end, and what is the measure of my days, that I may know how frail I am*” (Ps 39:4). He also said, “*Certainly every man at his best state is but vapor. Surely every man walks about like a shadow*”. (Ps 39:5, 6)

In remembering death, man is humbled and contrited, and humbleness and contrition brings about tears.

Joy and Emotion

As severe grief brings about tears, similarly they are caused by deep joy also.

The upright Joseph and his father Jacob could not control themselves from weeping greatly, at meeting each other after a long separation.

The great emotion within the heart overflowed through tears. The Scriptures say that when Joseph saw his father he “*fell on his neck and wept on his neck a good while*”. (Gen 46:29).

The same emotion and weeping occurred when Joseph made himself known to his brothers.

His feelings at this time differed to his feelings at the time of meeting his father. The Bible says, “*Joseph could not restrain himself...and he cried out, “Make everyone go out from me!”*” So no one stood with him while Joseph made himself known to his brothers. And he wept aloud ... Then Joseph said to his brothers, “*I am Joseph; does my father still live?*” (Gen 45:1-3).

We find the same emotion when Jacob, in his alienation meets Rachel, his cousin.

It was a joyful coincidence which he did not expect. When he saw her and watered her flock the Scriptures say, “*Then Jacob kissed Rachel, and lifted up his voice and wept. And Jacob told Rachel that he was her father’s relative and that he was Rebekah’s son*” (Gen 29:11).

The tears of joy is a long category...

Tears of joy for success and prosperity.

Tears of joy for reunion after a long separation.

Tears of joy for God’s work with us, in being rescued from any tribulation, and in the solving of any complicated problem.

Tears of joy for safety and relief.

So many are the tears of the saints for the reason of joy, and not all the tears are for weeping over sins.

We can mention here another domain for tears or a reason for it and that is, prayer.

Prayer

A person will weep in his prayers, if his prayers were from the depth of his feelings and affections.

He weeps in reverence whilst sensing his unworthiness to be in the presence of God. He weeps in front of the altar or the sanctuary whilst feeling the reverence of the place, or he weeps during Holy Communion also for the same feeling of reverence.

He wept in love of God Who accepted him and has not dealt with him according to his sins and weaknesses.

He weeps whilst being affected by some words in prayer that shook his feelings, as some priests weep whilst praying the fraction of “The Slaughter of Isaac” on Covenant Thursday.

He weeps whilst being embarrassed at not carrying out his promises that he promised to the Lord.

He weeps grieving over his weakness and shortcomings and over the times that he fell, as we say in the ‘Midnight Prayer’, “Give me, Lord, fountains of many tears as You did in the past to the sinful woman...”.

His tears during prayer are the tears of repentance because he was able at last to return to God after a long separation or after a deep one.

They are feelings that differ from person to person, by which the heart is affected and makes the eyes water.

There is another reason which calls for weeping and that is:

Feelings of Incapability

He who senses his power, ability and dominance over situations, would perhaps find it difficult to weep whilst in these feelings.

However, the one who feels deep within that he is incapable or unable to act in the right manner or perplexed in front of a problem, is the one who weeps.

When he weeps, he has nothing else in front of him except weeping. He prays during his weeping asking for a solution, and for help from Him Who can do all things.

We weep similarly, in front of a sick person that physicians are unable to treat, or in front of a disaster that there is no rescuing from, or an oncoming catastrophe that cannot be avoided.

The pain and weeping increases if this person is incapable and all those who surround him are incapable like him, in this circumstance.

The person might weep as a result of a sin or a lust or a habit that has dominated him and he wishes to be saved from it, but he feels his incapability in front of it. It could be also for the reason of an enemy who pressures him and disgraces him to the ground and he is totally incapable of resisting him and it seems there is no solution.

This feeling of incapability, if mingled with prayer and affection, then there is no escape from tears. Let us talk about another reason, which is:

The Feeling of Being Abandoned

This includes either the person standing alone and being abandoned by his friends and loved ones, or more so the feeling that grace has abandoned him.

The sensing of the heart that God has forsaken the person, even if it is an incorrect feeling but it exists, puts pressure on the person and so he suffers and weeps, especially if these feelings of abandonment occur during difficult circumstances and painful problems.

If the abandonment occurs during spiritual falls, the person thinks that he cannot rise from it.

Perhaps also, the person is surrounded with catastrophes or kinds of successive failures and he feels that all of this is due to God abandoning him as a result of his sins.

Amongst all of this, another reason for tears arises:

Gloating Over Another Person's Misfortune (Triumph)

As the poet said: "All the disasters pass by the young, but never mind them, except for the triumph of the enemies."

Gloating over someone else's misfortune is a reason for deep pain, whether from enemies or from troublesome comforters such as Job's friends (Job 16:2).

David the Prophet complained many times about this type of gloating in his Psalms. So he said, "*my God, I trust in You; Let me not be ashamed; Let not my enemies triumph over me*" (Ps 25:2). He cried out in another Psalm saying, "*LORD, how long will the wicked, how long will the wicked triumph?*" (Ps 94:3).

We see Micah the prophet gain his character outside of the triumph of the enemies which grieves the heart and so he says, "*Do not rejoice over me, my enemy; When I fall, I will rise*" (Micah 7:8).

If triumph continues, it makes the heart bleed and hence waters the eyes except for those who have been raised completely above the words of people. Even the saints were hurt by spiritual triumph especially from those who say, "Where is the Lord their God?"

CHAPTER FIVE

The Obstacles of Tears

- ✦ The Harshness of Heart
- ✦ The Judgment of Others
- ✦ Severity
- ✦ Anger and Malice
- ✦ Living in Sin
- ✦ Pleasure and Amusement
- ✦ Complaining
- ✦ Pride and Honour
- ✦ Negligence and Tepidity

The Harshness of Heart

The tears of the gentle and kind heart are close by. Tears are distanced however, from the harsh heart.

It was easy for Peter to weep bitterly, but it was difficult for Pharaoh or Herod to weep.

Likewise, stringency and firmness prohibit tears also.

For, at this time, the person is using power and not gentleness. The only exception to this situation is the firmness that springs forth from a heart full of love, as it was said about the Lord when cleansing the temple: “O You Who is powerful, holding the whip in Your palm, whilst love bleeds Your eyes”.

In our discussion on power and gentleness we can say that the tears of women are easier and more abundant than men’s. If a man weeps, however, his tears are much deeper. This is because his stringency or power cannot resist excited feelings, and so it is inevitable that the reason for tears was stronger and he was more affected by it.

Tears and harshness do not agree with each other.

If you seek tears, then distance yourself from harshness of heart as much as you can and from the appearances of this harshness. How can this be done? We will give you some examples:

The Judgment of Others

Especially harshness and stringency in judging others. There are individuals who are very severe in their judgments. If

they criticize someone, they criticize him harshly and stringently and with a heart which is void of love and affection, and void of appreciating the circumstances of others.

The tears of a person who is in this condition cannot flow, unless he gets rid of these feelings!

Speaking about other people's errors or defaming them is one of the major reasons that prohibits tears. At the same time, this defaming is one of the reasons that hardens the heart and distances it from gentleness, which is the characteristic of the children of God.

Judging others is not just harshness and severity, but it also includes the person forgetting his own personal sins.

He who forgets his sins, keeps away from the most important source for tears. The spiritual person on the other hand has compassion on sinners, remembering the power of the Enemy and his wars, the weak nature of mankind and also remembering his sins and falls. He weeps for those who have fallen as he weeps for himself. Saint Paul the Apostle said referring to this, *“Remember the prisoners as if chained with them, and those who are mistreated, since you yourselves are in the body also” (Heb 13:3).*

The man of tears could have such feelings, and he who has such feelings can acquire tears.

Saint John the short was of this type. When he saw someone sinning he used to weep and say, “This person fell today and I might fall tomorrow like him. He might sin, repent and be saved whereas I might sin and not repent”. In this way, the sins of people made him weep and did not move him to judge.

Saint Moses also used to regularly remember his sins and not the sins of people. There is a spiritual rule which says that the person usually falls into the sin that he judges for. God allows this, in order to embarrass the proud who judge others, and so that we know that if we walk in the right path, this is not because of a power within us, but as a result of this assistance which comes to us from above. If we judge others with harshness of heart, the protecting grace will abandon us and so we will fall like them.

When we fall and weep for our sins we will feel our weakness and that sin has, “... *cast down many wounded, and all who were slain by her were strong men*” (*Proverbs 7:26*). Then our hearts will become gentle, we will have compassion over others and we will not judge those who have fallen but will weep for their sake. We will feel that the devil is active and his activeness calls us to fear, to be cautious and to weep whilst asking for help.

We might hear that a lion has devoured a person along the path.

We should not judge this person but weep for him and weep for ourselves of the danger of this devouring lion, who the Apostle likened to our enemy the devil, who walks about seeking whom he may devour (1 Peter 5:8).

We might hear about a plague that injured others and they died. Should we weep for them or judge them?

In the same manner, sin, the devil, the condition of those who fell and those who judge. Judging then, is harshness, it is forgetting the enemy's power and it is forgetting human

weakness. They are all matters that distance tears. In the same way we can speak about the concealed judgment.

By the concealed judgment we mean the one which is hidden behind advising or reproaching or warning.

You might ask, “Does this mean that I should not advise or warn anyone?”. I say to you, “You can do this, but with love and not with a puffed up spirit and remember Paul the apostle’s saying to the Elders of Ephesus, “...remember that for three years I did *not cease to warn everyone night and day with tears*” (Acts 20:31). He warns but with tears, with tears filled with love and gentleness, fearing that they would fall and appreciating human weakness.

Remember that the surgeon at removing a corrupt part from a sick person, does it with compassion without being disgusted at the corruption of this part which he is removing, and without judging the sick person as a result of this.

Another reason that prohibits tears is:

Severity

The severe or violent person does not weep. His severity prohibits tears from him, no matter the type of this severity. The murderer does not weep and the slain might be in a state that would make the heart dissolve while he is beseeching him. However, the harshness of this heart during severity dries his eyes.

He weep afterwards, when he returns to himself and remembers his harshness. Similar is the one who destroys,

and the violent one. Likewise also, is he who is violent in competition or discussion, or in feuds, or in conflict with people, no matter its type. Tears escape from such a person who screams and raises his voice during his discussion with others. He who solves problems with violence, or imposes punishments using violence upon those who he heads, or uses violence in dealings, is also distant from the virtue of tears. Likewise also, is the bad-tempered:

Anger and Malice

It is impossible for a bad - tempered person to have the virtue of tears. As I said, tears are compatible with gentleness of heart. The bad - tempered person is characterized by rage, violence and harshness. All of these things are against tears.

It might be possible for a bad-tempered person to weep out of irritation and defeat.

Just as Esau wept when he discovered that his brother Jacob took the blessing from him (Gen 27:38).

However these are not amongst the spiritual tears that we are talking about. Perhaps the tears of irritation and defeat are present in family relations or in work situations. They are tears, but not the spiritual kind. Perhaps despair, incapability or failure pushes towards such tears. Spiritual tears however, spring forth from a pure heart that is gentle and sensitive.

He who acquires the virtue of tears and acts in an angry way loses this virtue.

He finds that his tears have dried up or left him, or at least at the time of his anger. If God has granted you tears and then you lost them, then enter within yourself and search for the reason and treat it. Ask yourself, was anger one of the reasons for your loss of tears?

Anger concentrates, during its revolution, on the errors of others. He who owns the virtue of tears however, concentrates on his personal sins.

His concentration on his own sins makes him weep, remembering his weakness, falls and his separation from God. Thinking about the errors of others during anger, excites the feeling and nerves and the person forgets his sins. The time of weeping is the time of feelings and sensitivities. The time of anger on the other hand is the time of nerves revolution and harshness. The time of weeping is governed by love, but the time of anger is governed by hatred. Therefore, do not blame another person, but blame yourself. The fathers say:

“The blaming of one’s self prohibits anger”.

If the person who blames himself is angered, he is angry with himself and not with someone else. Therefore, purify yourselves from anger if you wish God to grant you the virtue of tears.

It is the case, that, malice is more difficult and harsher than anger.

If judging others prohibits tears and anger avoids them, then malice, hatred and enmity are higher levels than anger and violence. They indicate the harshness of heart and the rejection of forgiveness for insulting the person offended. All of this disturbs the heart and makes it lose its gentleness.

Amongst the other reasons which hinder tears is living in sin.

Living in Sin

Pain as a result of sin brings about tears and repentance also. Living in sin and its pleasures however, prohibits tears.

For, over what will a person weep if he is happy with the life of sin that he is leading? Weeping comes from pricking the conscience that is revolting against the person. In the case of enjoying sin, then the conscience is asleep or sedated, and hence pleasure is leading the person and not the conscience.

The person in sin might weep if he loses sin!

His tears in this case would be a sin. Just as the children of Israel wept in the wilderness when they could not find meat to eat (Exodus 16:3). Likewise, the addicted person weeps, in not finding the drugs that he is used to; or as the lover of money weeps if he loses his money! Similar is he who weeps for physical pleasure if he finds its doors closed in front of him. The person who loves majesty and authority weeps if he loses it and becomes a normal person. They are all worldly or materialistic tears that are regarded as sin and can be added to the previous sins.

These sinful tears indicate a deep love for sin.

Thus, it indicates the separation of the heart from God. It also indicates the heart's attachment to the world and to

materialism. It is not the type of spiritual tears that we are speaking about.

A person might live in sin whilst having spiritual tears. How can this be? Here is an example of this.

A person lives in sin and is being defeated by a habit which is dominating him. So he weeps, wanting from all his heart to get rid of this sin, but his will is weak and cannot assist him!

This person will be rescued by grace and God will regard his weeping as a beginning for repentance. God looks at his heart and not his deed, if he is honest in his intention and in his tears. If also, he is committing the sin whilst not enjoying it but is defeated by it. So, pleasure also makes one lose his tears.

Pleasure and Amusement

Pleasure by its nature contradicts tears.

From where will tears come from for the person who lives in entertainment, pleasure and amusement, whilst enjoying money, materialism, authority and every worldly pleasure?

He needs the people's tears for him, in order to reach the life of tears.

He who lives the life of pleasure and amusement, hates tears because it upsets him! It cuts the rope of his amusement and it is like disharmony in the song of his pleasures! Such a person loves the world and the things that are in the world. All

these things sedate him so that he does not think about his eternity!

Hence, keep away from the life of pleasure, when you realize its trifleness you will weep over the days that you lost in it.

Now you can sing with Solomon the sage, “*all is vanity and grasping for the wind*”, “*Vanity of vanities, all is vanity. There is no profit under the sun*” (*Ecclesiastes 1*). The person who said these phrases is someone who tried and tasted all of the many types of pleasures of the world and said about them, “*Whatever my eyes desired I did not keep from them*” (*Ecclesiastes 2:10*). Despite all of this he found everything to be vanity and found out that, “*by a sad countenance the heart is made better*” (*Ecclesiastes 7:3*).

You must know that the life of pleasure is against you and not for you. It makes you forget your reality!

When the prodigal son used to live the life of worldly pleasure he did not realize what he was living in. However, he arrived at repentance and at contrition of the self when he returned to himself and felt his bad state. At this time only did he begin his real life as a son and returned to his father’s house.

We can then say that being preoccupied with laughter and humor prevents tears.

It is true what the sage said, “*A time to weep, and a time to laugh*” (*Ecclesiastes 3:4*). Despite this, it is difficult for those who live in a life that is all humor and laughter to reach the life of tears.

At least at the time of their laughter they are distant from tears.

Hence, the life of entertainment, laughter, pleasure and amusement prevents tears. On the contrary we can say that temptations, tribulations, diseases and pains are amongst the reasons for tears. Through them the person feels his weakness and the heavy burden upon him and so turns to God and pours his tears out in front of Him.

However, there is a condition that, he accepts the temptations and tribulations without complaining.

Complaining

Complaining is one of the reasons that prohibits tears.

The person who complains is dissatisfied and feels that he does not deserve all of what has happened to him. In his dissatisfaction and complaint he loses humbleness and contrition, which bring about tears.

In complaining, the person feels that he was unjustly treated and it follows that, he judges the person who treated him unjustly. In this way, he is transferred from thinking about his sins into thinking about the sins of others. This is against the syllabus of tears.

The person who complains, complains against God Himself and blasphemes!

In all of this he is completely far away from the spiritual atmosphere in which tears run. Whilst complaining he enters

into the harshness of heart, self-esteem and into anger and malice. It is impossible for him to find tears amongst all of these sinful things.

If tears agree with humbleness and contrition then there is no doubt that pride of heart and conduct prohibit tears. If tears agree with self-blame and self-reproach, thus that pride and speaking about one's virtues are amongst the reasons that prohibit tears.

It is impossible for a person to weep whilst he is happy with himself, raising his esteem and praising his characteristics!

We can say the same thing about majesty, the love of the first positions and seats and the love of honour and people's praise. All of these things prohibit tears totally. For, tears agree with feelings of weakness and not with feelings of power, majesty and authority!

Similarly, being proud of tears, prohibits tears.

Pride and Honour

You might follow the correct spiritual path, the life of repentance, humbleness, contrition and all the reasons for tears; if tears come to you, the devil fights you with them and makes you fall into vain glory. If you are happy with tears or proud of them or reveal them intentionally, then tears might prohibit themselves from you and cease. That is why the saints said:

“Whenever tears come to you, do not be preoccupied with them, but think of the reasons that brought about these tears.”

If you weep for example as a result of your sins, then think about the repugnancy of these sins and so, your contrition and tears will increase. Beware not to be proud of your tears or to be happy with them because at that time you have forgotten your sins and have been transferred from contrition to pride, that is, you have been transferred from the reasons for tears to the prohibitions of tears.

Your tears should be between you and God, do not reveal them to people and do not be proud as a result of them, for all of this prohibits them after they come.

Negligence and Tepidity

Tears are suited to all types of spiritual fervour, whether the fervour of love, repentance or emotion.

The tepid person however, does not have tears.

He needs to return to his first love and fervour, for tears to return to him. “Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent and do the first works.” (Revelation 2:5)

Tepidity comes as a result of carelessness or entertainment.

Treat carelessness then, in your spiritual life and be cautious of entertainment.

David the prophet during his humiliation, mingled his drink with tears (Ps 102:9). He used to drench his couch with his tears (Ps 6:6). In the life of entertainment however, he did not have any tears but there was lust and sin.

Likewise, his son Solomon did not benefit from entertainment, but benefited when he knew that all was vanity and grasping for the wind.

Therefore pray whilst saying, “Give me, LORD, fountains of many tears”.

BACK COVER

In This Book

**In the Name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit,
One God Amen.**

How beautiful tears are in the lives of the saints. It is an indication of their spiritual fervour and of the depth of their love of God.

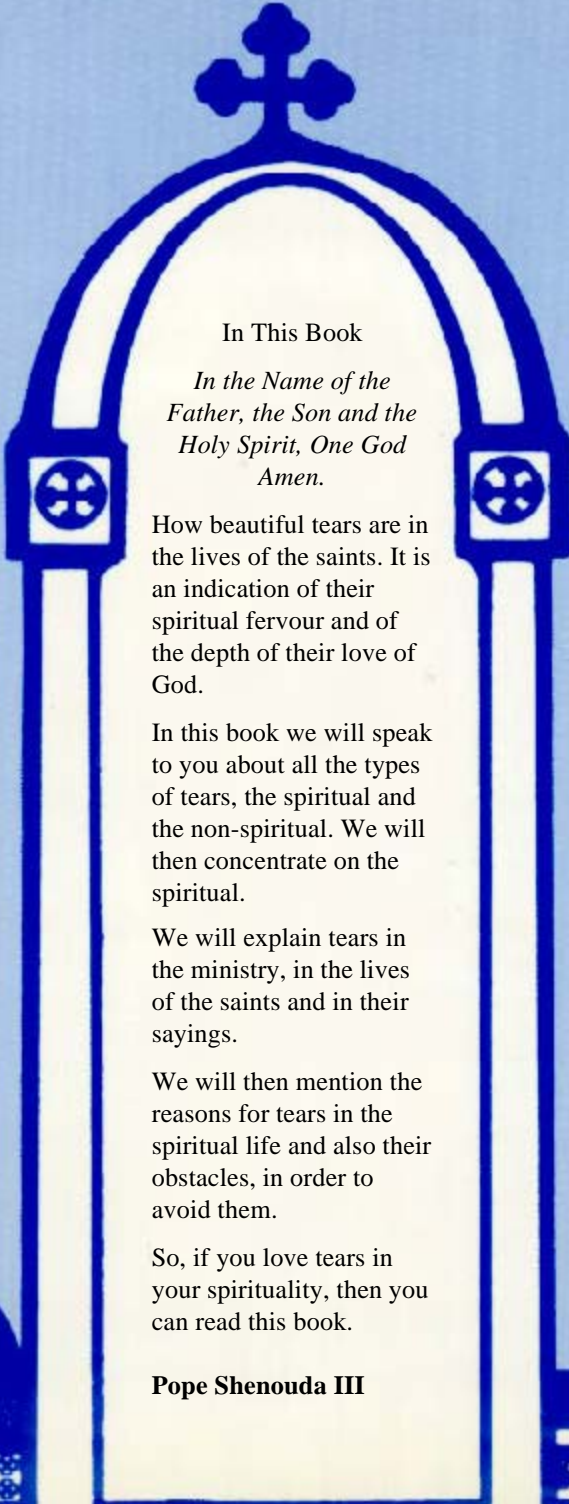
In this book we will speak to you about all the types of tears, the spiritual and the non-spiritual. We will then concentrate on the spiritual.

We will explain tears in the ministry, in the lives of the saints and in their sayings.

We will then mention the reasons for tears in the spiritual life and also their obstacles, in order to avoid them.

So, if you love tears in your spirituality, then you can read this book.

Pope Shenouda III



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