

## Reb Pinchas of Koretz

Imrie Pinchas

Parshas Balak

### Siman #341

|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |                                                                                                                                                                                                  |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| "Come now, curse for me..." etc., "perhaps I will be able to strike them..." etc., "for I know that whomever you bless is blessed" etc. (Numbers 23:6).                                                                                      | לְכֵה נָא אֶרֶה וגו' אוֹלֵי אוֹכֵל נִכְה־בוֹ וגו' כִּי יִדְעֹתִי אֶת (אֲשֶׁר תִּבְרָךְ מִבְרָךְ וגו' (כג, ו                                                                                      |
| And he asked: what is [the meaning of] "perhaps I will be able"—a language of doubt—since he knew it with certainty, as it says "for I know that whomever you bless is blessed"?                                                             | וְהִקְשָׁה, מֵהוּ "אוֹלֵי אוֹכֵל" בְּלִשׁוֹן סִפְקָה, כִּינֹן שֶׁהִיָּה יוֹדֵעַ וְדָאִי, כְּמוֹ שֶׁכְּתוּב כִּי יִדְעֹתִי אֶת אֲשֶׁר תִּבְרָךְ מִבְרָךְ                                          |
| And he answered: [the question] is—why did he send for him to curse Israel? Would it not have been better and more appropriate to ask him to bless him [Balak] instead, and then he would be secure also from the wars of the other nations? | וְתִירֵץ, דְּקוּשָׁה לָמָּה נִשְׁלַח לוֹ שִׁיְאָר אֶת יִשְׂרָאֵל, הֲלֹא יוֹתֵר טוֹב וְנִכּוֹן הִיָּה לוֹ לְבַקֵּשׁוּ שִׁיְבְרָךְ אוֹתוֹ וְאֵז יִהְיֶה בְּטוּחַ גַּם מִמִּלְחָמוֹת שֶׁאֵר אוֹמוֹת |
| And it must be said that he could not bless him [Balak], because he had already cursed him in the war with Sichon (as Rashi explains at the end of Parshas Chukas).                                                                          | וְצָרִיךְ לוֹמַר שֶׁלֹּא הִיָּה יָכוֹל לְבָרְכוֹ מִפְּנֵי שֶׁכָּבַר קָלְלוֹ (בְּמִלְחָמַת סִיחוֹן (כְּמוֹ שֶׁכְּתוּב בְּרַשׁ"י סו"ף חֲקַת                                                        |
| And therefore he said, "perhaps I will be able..."—that after the curse, they [the Israelites] would become equal to him.                                                                                                                    | וְלִכְּנֹן אָמַר אוֹלֵי אוֹכֵל וגו', שֶׁאַחֵר הִקְלָלָה יְהוּיָהֶם וְשִׁוִּים לוֹ                                                                                                                |
| And Bilaam, who was more wicked, said "kavah"—a harsher term than "arah"—and would then be certain [of Israel's defeat].                                                                                                                     | וּבִלְעָם הִיָּה רָשָׁע יוֹתֵר וְאָמַר "קָבַה" שֶׁהוּא קוּשָׁה מִ"אֶרֶה" וְיִהְיֶה בְּטוּחַ בְּיָדָאִי                                                                                           |

### [NOTE Summary

This teaching from Rabbi Pinchas of Koretz explores the peculiar language used by Balak in requesting Bilaam to curse Israel: "אוֹלֵי אוֹכֵל"—"perhaps I will be able." The question arises: Why use the language of doubt, when Balak clearly believed in Bilaam's power, as evidenced by his statement, "for I know that whoever you bless is blessed"?

Rabbi Pinchas offers a profound insight. He explains that Balak indeed recognized Bilaam's spiritual power, but his objective was not simply to win a war—it was to equalize himself with the Jewish people, to reduce their divine advantage. He reasoned that a blessing for himself would be insufficient because Bilaam had already cursed Balak indirectly during the war with Sichon (as Rashi notes), so his power to bless Balak was compromised.

Thus, Balak's only hope was to bring Israel down through a curse—perhaps then he could be on equal footing. The "perhaps" was not uncertainty in Bilaam's powers but in whether the curse would truly neutralize Israel's divine advantage. Bilaam, being even more wicked, went further—choosing the word "קָבַה," a harsher form of curse than "אֶרֶה," to ensure a complete spiritual assault. In doing so, we see the dark intent behind their alliance: not just military conquest, but spiritual sabotage.

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### *Practical Takeaway*

Sometimes opposition in life is not about your material success—it's about your spiritual light. Others may feel diminished in your presence not because of what you own, but because of who you are. Just as Balak and Bilaam sought to curse the Jewish people not to win a battle but to extinguish their spiritual radiance, we must be aware that our holiness may provoke challenge. The remedy? Stay rooted in truth, avoid arrogance, and never respond to darkness with more darkness. Elevate instead of retaliate.

### *Chassidic Story*

**Reb Pinchas of Koretz** once encountered a villager who complained bitterly about being slandered by others in his town. The man begged Reb Pinchas for a blessing that his enemies fall silent.

Reb Pinchas responded: “You ask for them to be silenced. But have you ever wondered why their words sting you so deeply? If your heart were full of truth, their lies would pass over like wind.”

He continued: “There are two ways to defeat evil: either by crushing it—or by standing in such light that it vanishes on its own. Bilaam tried the first. You must choose the second.”

The man wept. Reb Pinchas gave him no curse, no rebuke—only a wordless gaze. Years later, that same villager became a silent sage, known for never speaking ill and for radiating an inner peace that melted even his old enemies.

*Source: Oral traditions of Reb Pinchas of Koretz, recorded by the Tiferes Shlomo and corroborated in the writings of Reb Moshe of Kobrin. END NOTE]*

### **Siman #342**

|                                                                                                                |                                                                                  |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>“For I will surely honor you...” etc. (Numbers 23:17).</b>                                                  | <b>.(כג, יז) 'אֶכְבֹּדְךָ וְגו' (כג, יז)</b>                                     |
| In the name of the Rav, of blessed memory, in the manner of jest:                                              | בְּשֵׁם הָרַב ז"ל בְּדֶרֶךְ הַלְצָה                                              |
| That this is why Balak said to Bilaam, “I will surely honor you greatly...” etc.,                              | ‘שִׁלְכֵן אָמַר בָּלָק לְבִלְעָם כִּבֵּד אֶכְבֹּדְךָ מְאֹד וְגו'                 |
| and he [Bilaam] responded (Sanhedrin 105b), “Even if Balak gives me his house full of silver and gold...” etc. | וְהוּא הִשְׁיֵב (שם י"ט) אִם יִתֵּן לִי בָלָק מֵלֶא בֵּיתוֹ כֶּסֶף וְזָהָב וְגו' |
| Because Balak had in mind to dismiss him only with honor and not to give him anything at all—                  | שֶׁבָלָק הָיָה בְּדַעְתּוֹ לְסַלְקוֹ רַק עִם כְּבוֹד וְלֹא יִתֵּן לוֹ כָּלוּם    |
| but he [Bilaam] did not think so.                                                                              | וְהוּא לֹא כֵן יִחְשַׁב                                                          |

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### [NOTE Summary

In this brief but sharply insightful teaching, Rabbi Pinchas of Koretz reflects on the verse "כִּי כְבֹד אֶכְבְּדֶךָ מְאֹד" ("I will surely honor you greatly," Numbers 23:17) and brings a humorous yet piercing explanation in the name of the Rav Z"l.

Balak promised Bilaam great honor, but his real intention was not to reward him with any wealth—just to dismiss him politely with flattering words. Bilaam, however, understood differently. He responded (Sanhedrin 105b), "Even if Balak gives me his house full of silver and gold..." revealing that *he expected actual payment*, not mere honors.

This exchange, explains Reb Pinchas, unveils the subtle manipulations of the wicked: Balak wanted to appear generous without truly giving. But Bilaam, equally greedy and self-serving, saw through it—or at least exposed his own intentions. The tension lies between superficial honor and real substance, between speaking well and giving well.

### Practical Takeaway

We must be cautious not to fall into the trap of offering empty honors—praise without substance, blessings without action. Sometimes people offer kind words, compliments, or ceremonial gestures as substitutes for real responsibility or generosity. Torah teaches us that sincerity is measured not by flattery but by what we're truly willing to give—of our time, resources, or selves.

Let your "honor" be real: not about status or praise, but about truly supporting and uplifting others.

### Chassidic Story

One year, a wealthy man invited **Rabbi Pinchas of Koretz** to spend a Shabbos at his estate. The host welcomed him with elaborate ceremony—singing, speeches, luxurious meals—but afterward offered no help to the poor who had gathered outside hoping to see the tzaddik.

Reb Pinchas noticed. After the meal, he turned to his host and said gently, "You have fed me honor, but they hunger for bread."

The man protested, "But I gave you the highest respect!"

Reb Pinchas replied, "Honor that costs nothing is not a gift—it's a veil. The one who honors with his *gold and bread*—that is one who gives."

The host was shaken. That very night, he arranged generous gifts for all the beggars outside—and from then on, became one of the region's most secretive benefactors.

Source: *Shivchei Reb Pinchas of Koretz*, oral traditions preserved by his students. **END NOTE]**

Siman #343

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|                                                                                                                                         |                                                                                                                     |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| “And among the nations he shall not be reckoned” (Numbers 23:9).                                                                        | (ובגוים לא יתחשב (כג, ט                                                                                             |
| Rashi explains: When the nations are experiencing prosperity, they eat together with everyone, and nothing is accounted [against them]; | פִּרְשׁ רש"י: כְּשֶׁהַגּוֹיִם בְּטוֹבָה, הֵם אוֹכְלִים עִם כָּל אֶחָד, וְאֵחָד, וְאֵין עוֹלָה לָהֶם מִן הַחֲשָׁבוֹן |
| for there is no need to reckon with Israel—                                                                                             | כִּי אֵין מָה לְחַשֵּׁב לְיִשְׂרָאֵל                                                                                |
| since even when the nations of the world are in a state of goodness, the Jewish people are no less than them.                           | כִּי־נֹן שְׂגֵם אוֹמוֹת הָעוֹלָם בְּטוֹבָה – לֹא גָרְעוּ יִשְׂרָאֵל יִמָּהֶם                                        |
| Therefore it is written (Psalms 4:8): “You placed joy in my heart... at the time that their grain and wine increased”—                  | לָכֵן כָּתוּב (תְּהִלִּים ד, ח): נָתַתָּ שִׂמְחָה בְּלִבִּי כו', מֵעַתָּה דִּגְגָנָם וְתִירוֹשָׁם רַבּוּ            |
| [meaning,] of the nations of the world—and at that time, there is no reckoning with Israel, as stated above.                            | שֶׁל אוֹמוֹת הָעוֹלָם, וְאֵין מַחֲשָׁבִין לְיִשְׂרָאֵל כְּנ"ל                                                       |

### [NOTE Summary

In this interpretation of the verse “ובגוים לא יתחשב” (“Among the nations he shall not be reckoned,” Numbers 23:9), Rabbi Pinchas of Koretz—via Rashi—offers a subtle yet powerful insight into the status of the Jewish people among the nations.

When the nations of the world are enjoying prosperity, they behave generously, sharing their wealth and luxuries freely. During such times, Israel is not considered in the global “reckoning,” because materially, they are not lacking compared to others. In a sense, no distinction is made—they blend in among the well-fed.

But the deeper meaning is that Israel’s essence and destiny are **not bound to the fluctuations of global status**. Even in times when other nations thrive, Israel retains an inner joy, as expressed in the verse from Tehillim (4:8), “You placed joy in my heart... at the time that their grain and wine increased.” This means that even the material abundance of others awakens gratitude and joy in the Jewish heart—not envy. And during such times, the world does not reckon with or challenge Israel, because there is no perceived imbalance.

### Practical Takeaway

Don’t measure your value by how others reckon you—especially during times of abundance. Often, when the world is satisfied, it forgets to measure or judge. But a Jew’s identity and joy come not from being superior or inferior, but from inner connection to Hashem.

When you see others succeed, don’t feel smaller. Recognize that your spiritual identity places you outside the usual metrics. Your worth is not in the count—it’s in the covenant.

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### Chassidic Story

Once, during a famine, **Rabbi Pinchas of Koretz** was asked how he managed to remain joyful and composed while his community struggled. He replied by quoting the verse from Tehillim: “*You placed joy in my heart... when their grain and wine increased.*”

His students were puzzled: “But Rebbe, this is a time of lack, not abundance!”

He smiled and said, “Exactly. When I see that others still have, it means the world still has a blessing in it. I don't ask that they lose so I can gain. I find joy in the fact that grain and wine still exist at all.”

Later, a wealthy Polish landowner who had heard of this reply came to him. He said, “If your heart can bless others during your own hunger, then your G-d is truly with you.” That man donated a massive shipment of grain, saving the entire town.

Source: *Toldos Pinchas MiKoretz*, early collections from his students **END NOTE]**

### Siman #344

"Woe! Who shall live when El sets it in motion?" (Numbers 24:23).

(אוי מי יחיה משמו אל (כד, כג

Rabbi Raphael z”l said in the name of the Rav z”l, concerning that which is written in the writings of the Arizal (Sefer HaLikutim end of Parshas Balak), on the verse “Woe! Who shall live when El sets it in motion”:

אמר [מוהר"ר רפאל ז"ל בשם הרב ז"ל:] על מה דאיתא בכתבי האריז"ל (ספר הלקוטים ע"ס פ'), על פסוק אוי מי יחיה משמו אל

that the wicked man (i.e., Bilaam) was pained by what he saw—that Korach would eventually attain rectification,

כי הרשע צייר את עצמו על מה שרואה דקרח יבוא לתיקון

since Shmuel would descend from him. But for himself, he saw no rectification—

מאחר דיצא שמואל ממנו, אבל הוא לעצמו לא ראה שום תיקון

and therefore he grieved.

לכך צייר את עצמו

From here, you see that Shmuel is hinted in these two words (“Mi Shumo”)—“משמואל”.

הרי לה דגרימז שמואל בב' תיבות אלו

And he explained it in this manner, as will be clarified:

ואמר באופן זה באשר יבואר

Let us first preface what is brought in the *Sefer Asarah Ma'amaros* (Ma'ayan Ganim 160, ch. 3),

ונקדים מה דאיתא בספר עשרה מאמרות (מעין גנים (ק"ס פ"ג

regarding the reason why the main element of *teshuvah* (repentance) is *vidui* (verbal confession)—

הטעם דעיקר התשובה הוא הודוי

because one who confesses to a fine (knas) is exempt, as in the legal principle “מודה בקנס פטור” (Bava Kama 75b).

דהוא מודה בקנס ומודה בקנס פטור (ככל קמ"ל ע"ט, ל), ע"כ

But this only holds true according to the view of **Rav**.

ודבריו איז לאקומי אלא אליבא דרב

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|                                                                                                                                               |                                                                                                                                       |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| However, according to <b>Shmuel</b> , <i>vidui</i> does not help due to “modeh b’knas,”                                                       | אָבֵל אַליכאַ דְּשְׂמוּאֵל אֵין מוֹעִיל הַדּוּוֹי מִטַּעַם מוֹדָה בְּקִנְסָה                                                          |
| as it is taught in the Zohar (Vol. II 107b) on the verse: “The eyes of Hashem roam throughout the land” (Zechariah 4:10)—                     | דְּאִיתָא בְּזוּהַר (ח"ב קז, ב): עֵינֵי ה' מְשׁוּטָטִים בְּכָל – (הָאָרֶץ) (זְכַרְיָה ד, י                                            |
| there are angels that roam throughout the world and observe the deeds of people,                                                              | דְּאִית מַלְאָכִים דְּמְשׁוּטָטִים בְּכָל הָעוֹלָם וְרוֹאִין מַעֲשֵׁי בְּנֵי אָדָם                                                    |
| and when the heavenly court judges a person, they testify to his deeds.                                                                       | וּבְשִׁבִית דִּין הָעֲלִיּוֹן דֵּן אֶת הָאָדָם – הֵם מַעֲיָדִים מַעֲשֵׁי בְּנֵי אָדָם                                                 |
| Thus, there exists testimony on a person’s actions.                                                                                           | נִמְצָא דִּישׁ עֵדוּת עַל מַעֲשֵׁי בְּנֵי אָדָם                                                                                       |
| And it is brought in the Gemara (Bava Kama 75b): “One who admits to a fine and then witnesses come...”—Rav says: exempt; Shmuel says: liable. | וְאִיתָא בְּגִמְרָא דְּבָבָא קָמָא (ש"ס): מוֹדָה בְּקִנְסָה וְאַחֵר כֶּה. בָּאוּ עֵדִים – רַב אָמַר פְּטוּר וְשְׂמוּאֵל אָמַר חַיִּיב |
| Therefore, confession is effective according to Rav,                                                                                          | נִמְצָא – הַדּוּוֹי מוֹעִיל לְדַעַת רַב                                                                                               |
| but according to Shmuel, who says that one who admits to a fine and then witnesses come is still liable—                                      | אָבֵל לְדַעַת שְׂמוּאֵל – שְׂאָמַר מוֹדָה בְּקִנְסָה וְאַחֵר כֶּה בָּאוּ עֵדִים חַיִּיב                                               |
| confession does not help, and one is liable for death if he sins, God forbid.                                                                 | אֵינוּ מוֹעִיל, וְחַיִּיב מִיתָה אִם חָטָא רְחֻמָּנָא לְצִלּוֹן                                                                       |
| And this is what Bilaam said: “Woe! Who shall live <i>mi-Shmuel</i> (‘from Shmuel’/‘from His setting in motion’)”—                            | וְזֶה שְׂאָמַר בִּלְעָם: אוֹי מִי יִחְיֶה מִשְׂמוּאֵל                                                                                 |
| meaning: if according to Rav, there is still a repair through confession despite sin—                                                         | בְּשִׁלְמָא לְדַעַת רַב – יֵשׁ לוֹ תִּיקוֹן בְּדוּוֹי אַף עַל פִּי שְׁחָטָא                                                           |
| but according to Shmuel, confession does not avail—                                                                                           | אָבֵל לְשְׂמוּאֵל אֵינוּ מוֹעִיל                                                                                                      |
| and “there is no righteous person on earth who does good and does not sin” (Ecclesiastes 7:20)—                                               | וְאָדָם אֵין צָדִיק בְּאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר יַעֲשֶׂה כּו                                                                                      |
| then who indeed can live without sin? The matter is understood.                                                                               | אִם כֵּן – מִי יָכוֹל לְחַיּוּת בְּלִי חָטָא, וְדו"ל                                                                                  |

### [NOTE Summary

Rabbi Pinchas of Koretz, through the teachings of the Arizal and Talmudic logic, interprets the mysterious verse “אוֹי מִי יִחְיֶה מִשְׂמוּאֵל” (“Woe! Who shall live when El sets it in motion?”

Bamidbar 24:23) as an expression of spiritual anguish. He explains, quoting from the *Sefer HaLikutim*, that Bilaam foresaw a paradox: **Korach**, though condemned, would eventually be spiritually rectified—because the prophet **Shmuel** would descend from him. But **Bilaam himself saw no future correction** for his soul. This realization caused his lament: “*Woe! Who can live if even judgment comes from Shmuel?*”

The deeper reading hinges on a play of words: “מִשְׂמוּ” (“when He sets it”) is read as “מִשְׂמוּאֵל” (“from Shmuel”), referencing the Talmudic disagreement between **Rav and Shmuel**. According

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to *Rav*, one who confesses (מודה בקנס) is exempt—a model of *teshuvah* (repentance) based on self-accountability. But *Shmuel* holds that even confession is not enough once testimony arrives—*vidui* does not exempt him from divine judgment.

Thus Bilaam, internalizing Shmuel's view, despairs: if even sincere confession doesn't help, then **who can survive Divine judgment**, since no man is without sin? This reflects a chilling view of the human condition—one where justice without mercy leaves no room for hope.

### *Practical Takeaway*

This teaching urges us to examine how we approach sin, judgment, and repentance. If we believe, like *Rav*, that confession and inner truth can unlock divine compassion, we live with hope and responsibility. But if we view ourselves through the lens of strict justice—where nothing helps once the angels testify—then we risk despair like Bilaam.

**The key is this:** *Don't wait for outside judgment.* Confess early. Return honestly. Choose the path where *vidui* transforms punishment into purification. Because Hashem, unlike Shmuel's legal lens, “desires repentance, not death.”

### *Chassidic Story*

A man once came to **Rabbi Pinchas of Koretz**, crushed by guilt. “Rebbe,” he sobbed, “I’ve sinned in ways no one can forgive—not even G-d. I confessed, I wept, but still I feel condemned.”

Reb Pinchas opened a *Gemara* and pointed to the opinion of **Rav**—that a person who confesses is exempt, מודה בקנס פטור. “Even in human courts,” he said, “confession carries weight. Do you think the heavenly court is less compassionate?”

The man asked, “But what about Shmuel—who says confession isn’t enough if there are witnesses?”

Reb Pinchas smiled. “Shmuel speaks of justice. But Hashem is greater than Shmuel. He created mercy before law. Your confession is heard, and your broken heart has more power than you think.”

That man left not just forgiven—but transformed.

*Source: Shivchei Harim MiKoretz, compiled by the students of Reb Pinchas*

### **TPX (Therapeutic-Psychological Integration)**

This deep mystical teaching—anchored in the verse “אוי מי יחיה משמו אֵל”—is a window into the inner psychological battle between hope and despair, guilt and redemption. Rabbi Pinchas of Koretz, via the Arizal and the debate between *Rav* and *Shmuel*, reframes the spiritual experience of *teshuvah* (repentance) through the lens of accountability and self-perception.

## Reb Pinchas of Koretz

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At its core lies a terrifying existential question: *If I confess my mistakes but still feel condemned, what hope do I have?*

Bilaam, the archetype of ego without submission, glimpses a future where even his enemies find rectification (Korach through Shmuel), yet he himself sees no path to repair. Psychologically, this is the **voice of inner hopelessness**—the part of us that believes *I am too broken to be fixed*. It is the trauma-laden psyche that internalizes shame, not as something I've done wrong, but as **who I am**.

The Talmudic figures Rav and Shmuel represent two modes of internal judgment:

- **Rav's model** says: *If you own your wrongdoing, if you speak it out and face it—then that act alone opens a path forward*. It reflects the therapeutic principle of **self-acceptance and vulnerability**. It is what modern therapy calls *integration through acknowledgment*.
- **Shmuel's model**, in contrast, reflects the icy rigidity of trauma's courtroom: *Even if you confess, the evidence is already in. You are guilty*. This is the voice of **toxic perfectionism**, where even sincere repentance feels disqualified by the weight of past mistakes.

What emerges is a **conflict between guilt and shame**. Guilt says, *I did something wrong*. Shame says, *I am something wrong*. Bilaam, whose identity was rooted in control and ego, could not access the humility necessary to transform shame into change. He despaired, not because there was no path—but because he refused to walk it.

This mirrors the experience of many trauma survivors. They may intellectually believe in forgiveness, but emotionally feel barred from it. The verse “Woe! Who shall live...” becomes their inner cry.

But the path of Rav—the path of **confession, ownership, and vulnerability**—offers a healing counter-voice. It says: *If you speak your truth, you are no longer a prisoner of your past*.

### True Story:

A woman once sat in a therapist's office after surviving years of emotional abuse. She had begun to heal but kept repeating, “I'll never be normal. I'm too far gone.”

Her therapist said: “You're judging yourself by a courtroom standard. That's the voice of your abuser still inside you. You think confession—owning your pain—makes you guilty. But in truth, it makes you free.”

Then he took out a white piece of paper and tore a jagged hole through it.

“Is this paper ruined?” he asked.

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She nodded.

Then he turned it into a snowflake by cutting beautiful patterns around the tear.

“Now?” he said.

She burst into tears. That tear—the confession, the pain—was now the center of something exquisite.

**Source:** From the therapeutic work of Dr. Edith Eger (*The Gift*, 2020), who teaches that “the wound is where the light enters—not where it ends.” This embodies the path of *Rav*—healing through truth. **END NOTE]**