

## Tears in the Hesychastic Tradition<sup>2</sup>

### Łzy w tradycji hezychastycznej

**Keywords:** tears, the hesychastic tradition, the *Philokalia*, repentance, compunction, God's light.

**Słowa kluczowe:** łzy, tradycja hezychastyczna, *Filokalia*, pokuta, głęboka skrucha, Boskie światło.

#### Abstract:

Since the beginning of the Christian monastic life, a specific “theology of tears” has been developed. In the hesychastic tradition, in particular, tears were considered an essential element in the process of the radical turning towards God. They were combined with repentance, compunction, incessant prayer, thinking about coming death and remembrance of the Last Judgment. In this article, analysis of various texts on tears is based on selected works from the *Philokalia*. The typology of tears was the point of departure for the synthetic presentation of the meaning of tears of joy and consolation, the role of tears in the purification of sins, and their relation to repentance and compunction. In the hesychastic tradition, tears are perceived as God's gift. Tears are very helpful in the purification of the soul and in the change of intellect. They are also treated as support on the path of salvation. The *Philokalia* indicates a direct reference of tears to the experience of God's light.

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**Streszczenie:**

Od początku chrześcijańskiego życia monastycznego tworzona była specyficzna "teologia łez". Szczególnie w tradycji hezychastycznej łyzy były uważane za niezbędny element w procesie radykalnego zwrócenia się ku Bogu. Związane były z pokutą, głęboką skruchą, nieustanną modlitwą, myśleniem o nadchodzącej śmierci i pamięcią o Sądzie Ostatecznym. W niniejszym artykule przeanalizowane zostały teksty z wybranych dzieł wchodzących w skład *Filokalii*. Typologia łez stanowi punkt wyjścia do syntetycznego przedstawienia znaczenia łez radości i pocieszenia, roli łez w oczyszczeniu z grzechów oraz ich związku z pokutą i głęboką skruchą. W tradycji hezychastycznej łyzy są postrzegane jako dar od Boga. Łyzy są bardzo pomocne w oczyszczeniu duszy i przemianie umysłu. Traktuje się je również jako wsparcie na drodze zbawienia. W *Filokalii* zostało wskazane bezpośrednie odniesienie łez do doświadczenia Boskiego światła.

Tears are of great importance not only in the mental life of every human person but also in their spiritual life. In both the Old and the New Testaments one can find periscopes in which, through crying and tears, all kinds of feelings are expressed, not only sadness but also joy (Cf. Collins 1971, 18-38, 185-197). There are at least 510 mentions of weeping and tears in the Bible. In reference to biblical texts, the following types of tears can be distinguished: tears of sadness (Genesis 37:35), tears of compassion (John 11:35; Luke 19:41), tears of concern (Acts 19:31; Philippians 3:18; 2 Corinthians 2:4); tears caused by separation (1 Samuel 20:41-42; Acts 20:37-38; 2 Timothy 1:3-4), tears of fear and anxiety (Hebrew 5:7), tears caused by the loss of something worthwhile (Hebrew 12:16-17), tears of repentance (Psalm 6:7; Luke 6:21; Romans 5:8) and tears of punishment (Mathew 25:30). In the Christian ascetic literature, the subject of crying and tears has its references to both biblical texts and a person's spiritual experience (Cf. Chryssavgis 2002, 359-371; Lot-Borodine 1974, 131-195; Steidle 1938, 181-187). The desert fathers and their successors used their favorite words when they wanted to express some important elements of the specific "theology of tears". However, they did not always explain in their works how the

particular type of tears was characterized, which probably resulted from the common knowledge of this subject in the monastic environment.

### **Types of tears in Eastern Christian Spirituality**

St. Peter of Damaskos distinguished the following: weeping [Gr. *klauthmos*], tears of suffering [Gr. *epipona dakrya*], tears of prudence [Gr. *dakrya tes syneseos*], tears of soul [Gr. *to psychikon dakryon*] (Peter of Damaskos 1984, 204 {"Book I. A Treasury of Divine Knowledge"}; Petrou Damaskenou 1991, 106 {"Bibliion A, Tes Hypotheseos tou bibliou tou osiou kai theoforou patros hymon Petrou Damaskenou"}). For St. Nikitas Stithatos, tears were one of the most important topics of someone's spiritual life. He pointed out hot tears of repentance and the joyous tears proved by compassion which flow when "we are filled with inexpressible tenderness and delight" (Nikitas Stithatos 1995c, 97 {"On the Practice of the Virtues" 69}; Nikita Monachou kai Presbiterou 1991b, 289 {"Prote praktikon kefalaion ekatontas" 69}). The tears of repentance "are like a river in spate that sweeps away all the bastions of sin", and the tears that flow because of divine compassion "are to the soul like rain or snow to a field, making yield a bountiful crop of spiritual knowledge" (Nikitas Stithatos 1995c, 97 {"On the Practice of the Virtues" 70}; Nikita Monachou kai Presbiterou 1991b, 289 {"Prote praktikon kefalaion ekatontas" 70}). St. Diadochos of Photiki emphasized the importance of spiritual tears [Gr. *pneumatikon dikrion*] that arise when someone prays in the heart and he is filled with the energy of the Holy Spirit. These tears bring peaceful delight (Diadochos of Photiki 1979, 277-278 {"On Spiritual Knowledge" 73}; Diadochou 1982, 257 {"Logos asketikos dieremenos eis P' kefalia praktyka – gnoseos kai diakriseos pneumatikes" 73}). There may also be tears that "are sweet as honey" so misleading. They appear when somebody is deluded and premature. They cause forgetfulness of sins combined with pleasure. This kind of tears is the opposite to bitter tears that are shed when someone recalls the former sinful way of life (Peter of Damaskos 1982b, 235-236

{“Book II. Twenty-Four Discourses” 9}; Petrou Damaskenou 1982, 133 {“Biblion B; Logoi synoptikoi. Plereis notes pneumatikes gnoseos” 9}). Bitter tears, abundantly poured out, due to committed sins, connect the intellect with God (Peter of Damaskos 1984a, 98 {“Book I. A Treasury of Divine Knowledge”}; Petrou Damaskenou 1991, 24 {“Biblion A; Tes Hypotheseos tou bibliou tou osiou kai theoforou patros hymon Petrou Damaskenou”}). Tears of sorrow are accompanied by the fear of a sinner who realizes that he has lost so much. Instead of paradise, he participates in the perishable world, and instead of being with God and with the angels, the devil and the demons of impurity are close to him (Peter of Damaskos 1984a, 110 {“Book I. A Treasury of Divine Knowledge”} Petrou Damaskenou 1991, 34 {“Biblion A; Tes Hypotheseos tou bibliou tou osiou kai theoforou patros hymon Petrou Damaskenou”}).

St. Theognostos taught about the copious tears that the sinner will certainly shed in a contrite spirit. This may happen in the future life when, while being punished, he does not show repentance in his present life (Theognostos 1982, 370 {“On the Practice of the Virtues” 48}; Theognostou 1984, 264 {“Peri prakseos kai theorias kai peri hierosynes” 48}). Due to the outpouring of many tears of sadness [Gr. *ta polla dakria tes lypes*], it becomes possible to see clearly the sufferings of the Savior and to experience the relief caused by them (Peter of Damaskos 1984b, 235 {“Book II. Twenty-Four Discourses” 8}; Petrou Damaskenou 1982, 132 {“Biblion B; Logoi synoptikoi. Plereis notes pneumatikes gnoseos” 8}). As a result of someone’s spiritual transformation, tears of tribulation [Gr. *to katodinon dakrion*] are transformed into tears filling the sweetness of the word of God. This may be accompanied by a change from an entreaty prayer into a thanksgiving prayer. God is a great joy for the righteous, simple and humble people. Moreover, God is the comfort of those who are in sorrow because of Him (Gregory Palamas 1995, 315 {“To the Most Reverend Nun Xenia”}; Grigoriju tou Thessalonikes Metropolitou 1991, 110 {“Pros ten semnotaten en manazousais Ksenon. Peri pathon kai areton kai peri ton tiktomenon ek tes kata noun scholes”}).

Passing from tears of distress [Gr. *tes lypes dakrion*] and from the lustful passions to the state of spiritual joy, accompanied by tears of joy [Gr. *tes haras dakrion*], seems to be a slow process. At that time the intellect, overjoyed by the memory of God, forgets about anxiety and distress of this world and is not worried about anything. The experience of being free from anxiety is a source of joy and thanksgiving, which increases the received blessings – the gift of grace. In this condition, man rejoices and loves God and all people. He becomes humble and grateful (Peter of Damaskos 1982b, 260-261 {"Book II. Twenty-Four Discourses" 22}; Petrou Damaskenou 1982, 153 {"Biblion B', Logoi synoptikoi. Plereis notes pneumatikes gnoseos" 22}).

### **Tears of joy and consolation**

The philocalical authors wrote about various kinds of tears, referring them to the physical eyes as well as soul, intellect or heart. Such an approach to tears probably resulted from their conviction and direct experience that spiritual tears are accompanied by tears cried out of the carnal eyes. The source of tears is not only sadness, but also joy. Hence, one can also distinguish tears of joy that are experienced by the soul of man. The soul is like a bride who boldly calls the bridegroom: "Let my Beloved come down into His garden, and let Him feed on the hard-won consolation of my tears as though on choice fruit" (Song of Songs 5:1, LXX; Ilias the Presbyter 1981c, 60 {"Gnomic Anthology IV" 98}; Elia Presbiterou 1984, 309 {"Praktika kai theoretika" 98}). According to St. Peter of Damaskos, many tears of joy and understanding will well up in a human being when he turns away from all distractions and he concentrates on "practicing the virtues of body and soul". At the same time, one must reject thoughts and dreams not confirmed by the Holy Scriptures and avoid everything, both through listening and reading, which does not bring good fruits (Peter of Damaskos 1984a, 99-100 {"Book I. A Treasury of Divine Knowledge"}; Petrou Damaskenou 1991, 25-26 {"Biblion A', Tes Hypotheseos tou bibliou tou osiou kai theoforou

patros hymon Petrou Damaskenou”). Tears of solace [Gr. *to dakrion tes parakleseos*] flow in a man waiting calmly for death, when his intellect prays without any distraction while fighting by means of the power of God’s grace with bestial passions (Theognostos 1982, 366 {“On the Practice of the Virtues” 33}; Theognostou 1984, 261 {“Peri prakseos kai theorias kai peri hierosynes” 33}). St John of Karpathos pointed out that tears of consolation [Gr. *dakrion glykeon*] and holy thoughts [Gr. *noematon theion*] fill those who “till the earth of hardship and tribulation in their hearts”, reject temptations (John of Karpathos 1979, 305 {“For the Encouragement of the Monks in India who had Written to Him: One Hundred Texts” 30}; Ioannou Karpathiou 1982, 282 {“Logos asketikos kai panu paregoretikos pros tous apo tes Indias protrepsantas mnoachous, ton P’ kefalaiou ton arithmon synapopleton” 30}). Tears of understanding and joy change the spiritual sight of man. Thanks to this, the invisible attributes of God become visible to the intellect through the works of God (cf. Romans 1:20; Peter of Damaskos 1984a, 99 {“Book I. A Treasury of Divine Knowledge”}; Petrou Damaskenou 1991, 25 {“Bibliou A’, Tes Hypotheseos tou bibliou tou osiou kai theoforou patros hymon Petrou Damaskenou”}).

### **Tears and purification of sins**

What is the relationship of tears to the purification of sins? Evagrius the Solitary replied to this question in a very concise way: “many people, shedding tears for their sins, forget what tears are for, and so in their folly go astray” (Evagrius the Solitary 1979, 58 {“On Prayer: One Hundred and Fifty-Three Texts” 8}; Neilou Asketou 1982, 178 {“Prologos ton peri preseuches ekton pentekonsta trion kefalion” 8}). In this paradoxical situation, tears become only a way of releasing evil solely on the psychical level, without the change of intellect, which in no way affects the change of the way of life. For when the heart is tainted with sin, it is possible to purify it with tears, repentance [Gr. *metanoia*] and prayer [Gr. *proseuche*]

(Hesychios the Priest 1979, 197 {"On Watchfulness and Holiness" 195}; Hesychiu Presbiterou 1982, 172 {"Pros Theodoulon, Logos psychofeles kai soterios peri nepseos kai kretes kfalaïodes" 195}). We need to mourn our sins, crying during prayer, because it helps us to draw closer to God (Evagrius the Solitary 1979, 64 {"On Prayer: One Hundred and Fifty-Three Texts" 78}; Neilou Asketou 1982, 183 {"Prologos ton peri preseuches ekton pentekonsta trion kefalion" 78}).

Shedding of heartfelt tears and remaining in contrition of soul is a very important task for a monk who has fallen. The one who is convinced that he has completely lost himself in such a way can enter the path of rebirth and be able to take part in a war against evil spirits (Peter of Damaskos 1984a, 64 {"Book I. A Treasury of Divine Knowledge"}; Petrou Damaskenou 1991, 149 {"Biblion A, Tes Hypotheseos tou bibliou tou osiou kai theoforou patros hymon Petrou Damaskenou"}). The awareness of our own weakness and the power of God's grace help us not to lose tears that accompany the interior sorrow and the repentance that is so pleasing to God. If we lose the grace of tears, because of "past, present or future negligence or self-elation", we should put our hope in God with humility and ask Him for this gift to be regained (Peter of Damaskos 1984a, 121 {"Book I. A Treasury of Divine Knowledge"}; Petrou Damaskenou 1991, 43 {"Biblion A, Tes Hypotheseos tou bibliou tou osiou kai theoforou patros hymon Petrou Damaskenou"}). However, it should be remembered that when we pour our tears profusely because of our sinfulness, we must be very careful not to get caught up in the bad thoughts that want to stay on the surface of our consciousness. This deep existential truth was depicted by Ilias the Presbyter: "When the ship of sinfulness is overwhelmed by the flood of tears, evil thoughts will react like people drowning in the waves and trying to grasp hold of something so as to keep afloat" (Ilias the Presbyter 1984b, 50 {"Gnostic Anthology" III 27}; Elia Presbiterou 1982, 309 {"Gnostika" 27}).

## Tears and repentance

The basis for the unity with God, that is communication with Christ and intimacy with the Holy Spirit, is the washing of dirt and ugliness of sin, which can be possible through fervent tears and obeying Christ's sacred commandments (Nikitas Stithatos 1995a, 148-149 {"On Spiritual Knowledge, Love and the Perfection of Living: One Hundred Texts" 34}; Nikita Monachou kai Presbiterou 1991c, 334 {"Trite gnostikon kefalaion ekatontas peri agaes kai teleioseos biou" 34}). St. Symeon the New Theologian taught that tears and the experience of interior regret are necessary conditions for a true repentance or change of the intellect in us. Tears crush the petrified heart and enable the soul to reach spiritual humility. In this way the human being has been purified by the active presence of the Holy Spirit (Symeon the New Theologian 1995, 38-39 {"One Hundred and Fifty-Three Practical and Theological Texts" 69}; Symeon tou Neou Theologou 1984, 249 {"Kefalaia praktika kai theologika PME" 69}). The tears of change of intellect [Gr. *metanoias dakrysi*] are of great importance in the process of healing. St. Nikitas Stithatos referred to the symbolism of fire in relation to tears. He recommended: "a great need of the cleansing fire of repentant tears and voluntary ascetic labor", for a man, who was "imbued with the poison of evil" (Nikitas Stithatos 1995b, 110 {"On the Inner Nature of Things and on the Purification of the Intellect: One Hundred Texts" 9}; Nikita Monachou kai Presbiterou 1991a, 300 {"Deutera fisykon kefalaion ekatontas peri tes noos katharseos" 9}). Thanks to such a great fiery power of tears of repentance, it can be possible to overcome the spirit of self-indulgence, which we immobilize by such ascetic labor, like fasting, vigils, prayer, sleeping on the ground, and conscious refusal of sinful desires (Nikitas Stithatos 1995c, 90 {"On the Practice of the Virtues" 43}; Nikita Monachou kai Presbiterou 1991b, 283 {"Prote praktikon kefalaion ekatontas" 43}). Through the tears of repentance which, according to St. Peter of Damaskos, are bitter – the soul, in its pain and suffering, renounces the joy of this world and begins to see that its faults are innumerable,



like grains of sand in the sea. This condition of the soul is the beginning of its enlightenment and a sign of its health (Peter of Damaskos 1984s, 231 {"Book I. A Treasury of Divine Knowledge"}; Petrou Damaskenou 1991, 129 {"Biblion A' Tes Hypotheseos tou bibliou tou osiou kai theoforou patros hymon Petrou Damaskenou"}). With help of the tears of repentance we are proceeding towards purity of heart, which shines with the uncreated light of the Paraclete (Nikitas Stithatos 1995b, 133 {"On the Inner Nature of Things and on the Purification of the Intellect: One Hundred Texts" 89}; Nikita Monachou kai Presbiterou 1991, 321 {"Deutera fisykon kefalaion ekatontas peri tes noos katharseos" 89}).

### Tears and compunction

A common cause of tears is the memory of former falls. Tears born from the sense of self-sinfulness can be compared to boiling water which spiritually purifies the human heart. In this process of purification, compunction [Gr. *katanyxis*], that is a gift of God, is also needed. It descends as "the divine dew of the Spirit", comforting and refreshing the soul and introducing it into "the contemplation of the unapproachable light". This symbolism has a reference to verse 12 from Psalm 66 (LXX): "We went through fire and water; and Thou hast brought us out into a place where the soul is refreshed" (Nikitas Stithatos 1995c, 97 {"On the Practice of the Virtues" 71}; Nikita Monachou kai Presbiterou 1991, 289 {"Prote praktikon kefalaion ekatontas" 71}). Compunction is based on the experience of the forgiving love of God, Who gives us new life. This immortal life absorbs the mortal will of the flesh (see 2 Corinthians 5:4) by the presence of the Holy Spirit in those who strive truly towards the perfection of virtue. They are filled with unspeakable joy and gladness, because "a pure spring of tears has opened within them, and streams of sweet compunction flow down on them from above" (Nikitas Stithatos 1995c, 85 {"On the Practice of the Virtues" 24}; Nikita Monachou kai Presbiterou 1991b, 278 {"Prote praktikon kefalaion ekatontas" 24}). It is worth noting that Nikitas Stithatos directly combines compunction

with tears, which is expressed by one notion “tears of compunction” [Gr. *dakrya katanyxesos*]. If, for the sake of righteousness, tears of compunction are sown in man, then in this way it has been accumulated as a harvest of life – an unspeakable joy (see Psalm 126:5) and a rich crop of divine knowledge (Nikitas Stithatos 1995a, 155-156 {“On Spiritual Knowledge, Love and the Perfection of Living: One Hundred Texts” 54}; Nikita Monachou kai Presbiterou 1991c, 340 {“Trite gnostikon kefalaion ekatontas peri agaes kai teleioseos biou” 54}). Tears of compunction are characterized by sweetness of the grace of the Holy Spirit (Nikitas Stithatos 1995b, 119 {“On the Inner Nature of Things and on the Purification of the Intellect: One Hundred Texts” 45}; Nikita Monachou kai Presbiterou 1991a, 283 {“Deutera fisykon kefalaion ekatontas peri tes noos katharseos” 45}). When this kind of tears flows from man’s eyes, this indicates that the kingdom of God has come upon him and he has become “pregnant with the Holy Spirit” (Nikitas Stithatos 1995a, 157 {“On Spiritual Knowledge, Love and the Perfection of Living: One Hundred Texts” 58}; Nikita Monachou kai Presbiterou 1991c, 341 {“Trite gnostikon kefalaion ekatontas peri agaes kai teleioseos biou” 58}).

### **A gift of tears and the memory of death**

St. Philotheos of Sinai pointed out the connection between the gift of tears and the mindfulness of death. The concentration on death is “the mother of prayer and tears”. It introduces a man into a state of vigilant guarding of the heart and detachment from material things and is also a source of attentiveness [Gr. *prosochi*] and discrimination [Gr. *diakri-sis*] (Philotheos of Sinai 1984, 30 {“Forty Texts on Watchfulness” 38}; Philotheou tou Sinaitou 1984, 292 {“Neptika kefalaiia M” 38}). Through the mindfulness of death, the healing tears flow from our bodily eyes, while from the noetic eyes rises a fount of wisdom, which delights the mind (cf. Philotheos of Sinai 1984, 17-18 {“Forty Texts on Watchfulness” 6}; Philotheou tou Sinaitou 1984, 275 {“Neptika kefalaiia M” 6}). The mindfulness of death makes us realize that a beautiful man – created

in the image and likeness of God – will rest in the grave after the end of his earthly life. His physical form will be destroyed. Meditation on the process of the disintegration of the human body was aimed at pouring out tears and encouraging fervent compunction (Peter of Damaskos 1984a, 114 {“Book I. A Treasury of Divine Knowledge”}; Petrou Damaskenou 1991, 37 {“Biblion A, Tes Hypotheseos tou bibliou tou osiou kai theoforou patros hymon Petrou Damaskenou”}).

### **The gift of tears and prayer**

Hesychasts taught that tears should be joined with prayer. They considered this issue very important in achieving spiritual health and cutting off all evil, in order to stand humbly before God. Tears poured out during somebody’s prayer were not only an important help in confessing sins and achieving peace with God, but also a remedy for lustful passions (Evagrius the Solitary 1979, 58 {“On Prayer: One Hundred and Fifty-Three Texts” 7}; Neilou Asketou 1982, 177 {“Prologos ton peri preseuches ekton pentekonsta trion kefalion” 7}). In “Theoretikon” of St. Theodor the Great Ascetic, tears and prayer are treated as a remedy. Prayer combined with tears helped to keep one’s attention on God. Prayer expresses thanks for blessings received. It is also the petition both for the forgiveness of sins and for the power of God. For the soul is too weak to strive for good and be united with God in its own power. Tears strengthen prayer, because thanks to them we can obtain God’s mercy and purification of all defilements caused through sensual pleasures (Theodoros the Great Ascetic 1982, 45-46 {“Theoretikon”}; Theodorou 1982, 331 {“Theoretikon”}). Tears with prayer are helpful on the path of repentance, because they evoke feelings of disgust and shame of the previous love of passions. They also contribute to the precise understanding of all sins. Thanks to this, it becomes possible to effectively cut oneself off from evil (Isaiah the Solitary 1979, 25 {“On Guarding the Intellect: Twenty-Seven Texts” 17}; Isaïou tou Anachoretou 1982, 33 {“Peri tereseos tou noos” 17}). Moreover, prayer with tears in an attitude

of humility, without despising anyone, destroys pride, which is very important on the way to God (Thalassios the Libyan 198, 327 {"Fourth Century on Love, Self-control and Life in accordance with the Intellect" 36}; Thallassiou tou Libyos kai Afrikanou 1984, 225 {"Peri agaes kai egkrateias kai tes kata noyn politeias ekatontas tetarte" 36}). According to St. Maximos the Confessor, humility consists in constant prayer with tears and suffering. The ceaseless calling upon God is the only way to prevent oneself from putting confidence in one's own strength and wisdom and from putting oneself above others (Maximos the Confessor 1982, 97 {"Four Hundred Texts on Love. Third Century" 87}; Maximou to Omologetou 1984, 39 {"Peri agapes kefalaion ekatontas trite" 87}). When the faithful pray with tears it brings joy to God Who responds to their needs. This truth is well expressed by Evagrius the Solitary: "Pray with tears and all you ask will be heard" (Evagrius the Solitary 1979, 58 {"On Prayer: One Hundred and Fifty-Three Texts" 6}; Neilou Asketou 1982, 177 {"Prologos ton peri preseuches ekton pentekonsta trion kefalion" 6}). Tears poured out due to committed sins along with prayer and reading the Word of God have an impact on the condition of the body of someone involved in an ascetic practice (Peter of Damaskos 1984a, 145-146 {"Book I. A Treasury of Divine Knowledge"}; Petrou Damaskenou 1991, 61-62 {"Biblion A, Tes Hypotheseos tou bibliou tou osiou kai theoforou patros hymon Petrou Damaskenou"}).

### **A petition for the gift of tears**

Tears are not only a manifestation of human physiology but also a gift from God: "First pray for the gift of tears, so that through sorrowing you may tame what is savage in your soul" (Evagrius the Solitary 1979, 58 {"On Prayer: One Hundred and Fifty-Three Texts" 5}; Neilou Asketou 1982, 177 {"Prologos ton peri preseuches ekton pentekonsta trion kefalion" 5}). Tears reach the depths of the soul and it helps a Christian to confess his/her sins and receive the remission of sins from the Savior.

## Tears and purification of the soul, and the change of intellect

It is also worth emphasizing that tears play an important role in relation to the purification of the soul and the change of intellect [Gr. *metanoia*]. In Christianity, it is essential to understand man as an integral being. Three particular parts of one's identity can be distinguished, namely: the intellect [Gr. *nous*], the soul [Gr. *psyche*], and the body [Gr. *soma*]/flesh [Gr. *sarx*]. With such a vision of the human, it follows that physiological tears affect the intellect and the soul. St. Theodoros the Great Ascetic encouraged meditation on all possible penalties and the chastisements in hell for the sinner, so that these thoughts would cause an abundance of tears, cleansing the soul (Theodoros the Great Ascetic 1982a, 24-25 {"A Century of Spiritual Texts" 57}; Theodorou tou megalou asketou kai episkopou Edesses 1982a, 313 {"Kefalaia pany psychofele P" 57}). Nikitas Stithatos taught that tears are very helpful in the process of cleansing the entire soul. Moreover, the soul can be softened by compunction and illuminated by the light of the Holy Spirit (Nikitas Stithatos 1995b, 127 {"On the Inner Nature of Things and on the Purification of the Intellect: One Hundred Texts" 69}; Nikita Monachou kai Presbiterou 1991a, 315-316 {"Deutera fisykon kefalaion ekatontas peri tes noos katharseos" 69}). The great importance of purifying the intellect through tears was emphasized by St. Gregory of Sinai. In his opinion, the shedding of tears gives us the possibility of partaking in angelic life, but only if the soul of a man has been resurrected by the power of the Holy Spirit (Gregory of Sinai 1995, 221 {"On Commandments and Doctrines, Warnings and Promises; on Thoughts, Passion and Virtues, and also Stillness and Prayer: One Hundred and Thirty-Seven Texts" 45}; Grigoriju tou Sinaitou 1991, 38 {"Kefalaia di' akrostichidos pany ofelima logoi diaforoi peri entolon, dogmaton, apeilon kai epaggelion, eti de kai peri logiskon kai pathon kai areton, eti de kai peri hesychias kai proseuchas" 45}). For St. Symeon the New Theologian it was obvious that a man who would cleanse his intellect through many tears receives

enlightenment caused by the divine light (Symeon the New Theologian 1995, 61-62 {"One Hundred and Fifty-Three Practical and Theological Texts" 152}; Symeon tou Neou Theologou 1984, 269 {"Kefalaia praktika kai theologika PME" 152}). The abundance of tears not only cleanses the man, but also starts the experience of God's light and introduces the anticipation of the reality prepared for the saved on the other side of life.

Furthermore, tears have a great impact on the spiritual center of a man, namely on the intellect. If a Christian sows seeds of hope in the heart in tears, he can expect that he will harvest with joyful shouting (cf. Psalm 126:5). The source of tears can spurt out in an ascetic, but only if he has achieved great humility. In such a state, a man enters the peace of Spirit that transcends every dauntless intellect (cf. Philipians 4:7) and is united to God (Nikitas Stithatos 1995b, 129 {"On the Inner Nature of Things and on the Purification of the Intellect: One Hundred Texts" 79}; Nikita Monachou kai Presbiterou 1991a, 318 {"Deutera fisykon kefalaion ekatontas peri tes noos katharseos" 79}). A humble person who cries is doubly rewarded: by God moved by his tears Who takes pity on him and by people who have been inclined to give him praise that he never sought (Symeon the New Theologian 1995, 27 {"One Hundred and Fifty-Three Practical and Theological Texts" 14}; Symeon tou Neou Theologou 1984, 239 {"Kefalaia praktika kai theologika PME" 14}).

### **Tears and the salvation of man**

What is the role of tears in relation to salvation and intimacy with God? In Eastern Christian spirituality, tears are treated as support on the path of salvation. Their abundance, which testifies to the intensity of the process of purification and healing of man, was considered as a sign that someone is on the narrow path leading to salvation (see Mathew 7:13-14). In another case, however, when someone scatters his energy and he does not direct it to God then his tears dry up (Ilias the Presbyter 1981a, 40 {"Gnomic Anthology I" 59}; Elia Presbiterou 1984b, 294 {"Praktika kai theoretika" 59}). The one who fights with an opponent needs allies.

Thanks to them his depressed heart will call for God's help. These allies are: humility of the soul, the hardships of the flesh and all kinds of ascetic struggles connected with prayer and an abundance of tears.

It is important to ask God with tears for the gift of salvation (Theognostos 1982, 364 {"On the Practice of the Virtues" 24}; Theognostou 1984, 259 {"Peri prakseos kai theorias kai peri hierosynes" 24}). Tears purify a person who is stimulated by the Holy Spirit (Nikitas Stithatos 1995b, 96 {"On the Inner Nature of Things and on the Purification of the Intellect: One Hundred Texts" 66}; Nikita Monachou kai Presbiterou 1991a, 288-289 {"Deutera fisykon kefalaion ekatontas peri tes noos katharseos" 66}). St. Symeon the New Theologian advised monks not to go to Communion without tears (Symeon the New Theologian 1995, 59 {"One Hundred and Fifty-Three Practical and Theological Texts" 144}; Symeon tou Neou Theologou 1984, 267 {"Kefalaia praktika kai theologika PME" 144}). This mystery [Gr. *mysterion*] is a special encounter with God Who descends into the human heart and purifies it with the fire of the Holy Spirit. The Eucharist itself should also be offered in a state of watchfulness, with repentance and in tears as an atonement for sins.

### **Tears and the experience of God's light**

Tears that are poured out constantly and abundantly have a direct reference to the experience of God's light as well. It is difficult to describe this reality, because all the concepts that could be used are insufficient and inadequate to express the mystery belonging to the future age. Therefore, to describe some mystical experiences, St. Symeon the New Theologian used the language of paradox, which only to a certain extent helps to understand what happens to a man when God's light descends into him. The following text serves as a good example of difficulties in describing such mystical experiences:

The person inwardly illumined by the light of the Holy Spirit cannot endure the vision of it, but he falls face down on the earth and cries out in great fear and amazement, since he has seen and experienced

something that is beyond nature, thought or conception. He becomes like someone suddenly inflamed with a violent fever: as though on fire and unable to endure the flames, he is beside himself, utterly incapable of controlling himself. And though he pours forth incessant tears that bring him some relief, the flame of his desire kindles all the more. Then his tears flow yet more copiously and, washed by their flow, he becomes even more radiant. When, totally incandescent, he has become like light, then the saying is fulfilled, 'God is united with gods and known by them' (Symeon the New Theologian 1995, 38 {"One Hundred and Fifty-Three Practical and Theological Texts" 68}; Symeon tou Neou Theologou 1984, 249 {"Kefalaia praktika kai theologika PME" 68}).

Based on the above description, one can conclude that the intimate union of man with God has taken place. God's will is to unite with those who have united with Him. God reveals Himself to those who know Him. In some astonishing way, tears open the human person to the experience of God as Light. Consequently, the Light permeates him and brings him into a state that is already a haven of salvation and this happens already here on earth. It should be remembered, however, that the indispensable condition, though in no way providing the experience of God's light, is to stay humble and not to be subject to the deception of visible things. If the soul of man, with all its strength, wants to contemplate immaterial light and renounces everything that comes from sense perception, then it is possible to receive the gift of God's grace which will open a source of tears. Such tears will affect the senses and sweeten them, and they fill the intellect with all manner of joy and Divine light, making it humble and prepared for contemplation of the higher world (Nikitas Stithatos 1995b, 119 {"On the Inner Nature of Things and on the Purification of the Intellect: One Hundred Texts" 45}; Nikita Monachou kai Presbiterou 1991, 309 {"Deutera fisykon kefalaion ekatontas peri tes noos katharseos" 45}).



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Tears of repentance and compunction because of sins committed arise from the heart. From the first centuries of Christianity tears have been treated as a sign of the process of transforming man by the grace of the Holy Spirit. The experience of one's own identity in their personal relationship with God opens up the source of tears that flow, thus giving witness to what is happening in the human heart. If a sinner will look into his soul and acknowledge spiritual illnesses then he can discover the need for crying (cf. Maloney 2008, 84-88). The desire for spiritual healing is often combined with abundant tears. It happens because of humility. This gift of God of looking into one's heart is manifested in crying over the state of sinful slavery, which affects not only each individual person, but also the entire human race. The teaching of the hesychastic masters about the role of tears in the spiritual life of a Christian still remains relevant and helpful in the desire for intimacy with God in the Holy Trinity.

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