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The Ritual of Tears with Isaac of Nineveh¹

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He who does not cry, does not see.

Victor Hugo

As a bitter expression of finiteness, vulnerability, pain and weakness, our tears reflect our, oh so human, condition. If the Semite considered the living as a compound of flesh and blood, مُتَّحِنًا , and given that living creatures cannot survive without water, and that the water source is the metaphysical equivalent for eye, life, light, vision and knowledge, he acquired the brilliant idea to summarize his human condition with an incomparable lexical composition², indicating that his tears are the blood flowing in his eyes, $\text{مُتَّحِنًا} : \text{مُتَّحِنًا}$, the most powerful element for conversion, change and revitalization.

The eye, 'ain, is the only letter in the Semite Alphabet (the sixteenth: 4x4) which is, at the same time, a phoneme, a morpheme, lexeme and a noun, designating both the source of light as a sensorial body and the source of water wherein we can fill our pitcher and quench our

¹ This conference has been given in Moscow at the *The International Theological Conference "Saint Isaac the Syrian and his Spiritual Heritage"*, organized by St Cyril and Methodius Postgraduate and Doctorate School of the Moscow Patriarchate, Moscow, October 10th -11th, 2013.

² In his book, *L'esprit de la lettre, pour une sémiotique des représentations spirituelles dans la littérature française des XIX^e et XX^e siècles (The Spirit of the Message, For a Semiotics of Spiritual Representation within the French Literature of the Nineteenth and Twentieth centuries)*, Paris, L'Harmattan, 2009, Daniel S. Larangé sheds light on the intimate relationship between what is metaphysical and the Semitic languages; he indicates: "Research in biblical semantics paved the way for the practice of semiotic research. The works of James Barr (1924-2006) focused attention towards the "linguistic" functioning of Semitic thought, which gives great value to the functioning of its languages and the wordplay it generates, to the extent of making them their alethic criteria. Moreover, Semitic metaphysics imply a complicated and irreducible relationship between what is real and the words." (p. 35). He added on pages 60-61: "This, particularly, is the case of biblical literature in Hebrew, or in Arab poetic and philosophical works where the meaning is hidden in the texture of sentences and Semitic phrasing..." Benjamin-Lee Whorf (1897-1941) already highlighted this idea saying: "The grammar of a language is its theory of reality" (p. 61), in Benjamin-Lee Whorf, *Linguistique et anthropologie* (1965), Claude Carme (tr.), Paris, Denoël / Gonthier, 1971 (Médiations ; 90).

In fact, even though Gregory of Nyssa is of Greek culture and expression, he speaks, in his book *Oratio funebris de Placilla* (PG. 120, 480 C), of tears as being the blood coming out of the wounds of the soul.

thirst³ حَمًا صَحْبًا وَمَا. The first receives light from the outside, in order to reflect it onto the retina, to assimilate it, to transmit it to the brain via the optic nerve to nourish the conscience; the second summons its water from within, with a groan, in order to refresh, and comfort, the inhabitant of an unknown exterior. While the first operation is qualified as a grace, the second is certified as of Adamite specificity.

Both the internalizing and exteriorizing movements overlap under the eyelids of this Adamite who reacts to light, whether he is *abile* اَبِيْلًا, or a simple inhabitant of the earth *submerged* in the valley of tears. The internalizing, or descending movement, is a process seeking the depth of the human being, in order to implant the seed of life, which is capable of rising or exteriorizing to get out of sensibility and go beyond the limit of time and space. In fact, it is a cross-dialect confirming power in weakness and a love of life in death.

Based on this Semitic metaphysics, widely developed in biblical writings and patristic explanations, Isaac of Nineveh lays the pillars of his ritual of tears, in order to join the whole history of oriental thought, which anthropology constitutes its essential part⁴. It goes without saying that, in order to go into details in this subject, we are compelled to go through the human being, the whimpering creature with triple speeds: the physical, psychological and spiritual⁵. We see these two movements investigated everywhere.

At this point, and before going into details, we would like to shed light on the importance of the works of S. Brock and H. Alfeyev, among others, who noticed the significance of tears to Isaac while describing their intensity, type and place within the spirituality of our author. However, if there is always a means to tackle this issue while avoiding sterile repetitions, it seems that recourse to Isaac's method itself, finding pearls in the depth of the ocean, and not limiting them to the pearls laid on the shore, can be useful for our adventure on Russian soil.

³ Paul Bedjan, *Mar Isaacus Ninevita, De perfectione religiosa*, Leipzig, 1909; reprinted by Georgias Press in 2007, p. 126.

⁴ We refer to the Syriac texts edited by Fr. Bedjan, *Mar Isaacus Ninevita, De perfectione religiosa*, Leipzig, 1909; and reprinted by Georgias Press in 2007. The Greek version, or the first part (I), was translated in the beginning of the nineteenth century by Jaques Touraille, *Isaac le Syrien, œuvres spirituelles*, Desclée de Brouwer, 1981, and retranslated by Placide Deseille, Monastery of Saint Anthony The Great, Monastery of Solan, 2011.

The second part (II) is translated into English by Sebastian Brock and published in Syriac and in English: Isaac of Nineveh (Isaac the Syrian), *Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalum*, vol. 554 and 555, LOVANII, in Aedibus Peeters, 1995. The same part was also translated into French by Dom Andre Louf: *Isaac le Syrien, œuvres spirituelles II*, 41 newly discovered speeches, *Spiritualité orientale*, no. 81, Abbaye de Bellefontaine, 2003.

The third part (III) was also translated by Dom Andre Louf: *Isaac le Syrien, œuvres spirituelles III*, *Spiritualité orientale*, no. 88, Abbaye de Bellefontaine, 2009.

For quotations, we are using I, II or III referencing one of the three parties followed by the number of the chapter and the number of the paragraph.

⁵ Jean le Solitaire, known by Isaac, has already talked about them. See Study by Irénée Hausherr, *Aux origines de la mystique syrienne, Grégoire de Chypre ou Jean de Lycopolis, Orientalia Christ. Per. IV* (1938), P. 497-520. We can find the same structure with Jean de Dalaytha, Joseph Hazzaya and Dadisho. See Robert Beulay, *La lumière sans forme, Introduction à l'étude de la mystique chrétienne syro-orientale*, Chevetogne, Belgium, and Sebastian Brock, *La prière et la vie spirituelle selon les Pères Syriaques, Parole de l'Orient*, 26 (2001).

Indeed, any study about Isaac of Nineveh requires preparation, introduction and seeking in three distinct dimensions, in order to understand the subtlety of an author who has foraged on all the flowers of eastern, biblical and Semitic mysticism. This is how we describe the sources; the Bible – its Old and New Testament on the one hand, and various Fathers rich in faith and spirituality, especially Evagrius, Arsene, and Ephraim on the other hand. Though, with Isaac, it seems that there is always an unparalleled source which is of particular importance; this is his personal experience⁶. In his life as a monk, hermit and spiritual master, Isaac does not limit himself to transmitting what he has received with an inexorable fidelity, but he assimilates, explains and re-writes, in his own way, what he has witnessed, seen and heard.

How does he move from tears that express weakness and pain to the floods of tears that revive the human being, submerged in his renewed Adamic condition? This is what we will examine in detail within this paper. In addition, despite the fact that this act, in most cases, is personal, the ceremony, just like the ritual, can only be collective, ecclesial and social, especially because the *us* always replaces the *I* in such a process, or at most, it is the *I* that speaks as an *us*, on behalf of the *us*, for the *us* and in the *us*. Isaac's tears, the renewed human source, constitute a true ritual with the ideal type that can only be sought on the Cross of the Christ, the Savior.

To get there, and following his predecessors mentioned above, we have to remember some textual specifications that uncover different kinds of tears examined by Isaac.

Firstly, the **purifying tears** wash sins, touch God's heart and ensure to the penitent **لُحْمًا** reconciliation and blessing.

“Shedding tears during prayers are a sign *šudo* ‘**لُحْمًا**’ that the soul has received divine mercy due to repentance, that has been accepted, and that, through its tears, it has started to enter the world of purity.” (I, 33/11; Bedjan, p. 384)

“That such a man begs God, with compunction and tears, and with a sorrowful heart, to purify him from any sin, and to strip him from the organs of the old sinful man, that are the worldly *motions* **لُحْمًا** ‘*zaw*’. This mortification (of the body) makes us rise to the mortification of the soul.” (II, 3, Centurio 1/85)

“The spiritual act of repentance, these are the tears of the hidden man poured in his heart when he understood the love of his Father, not when he is afraid of judgment. This is his occupation in his continuous meditation in God, in the hidden intercession of the *Thought re'yon* ‘**لُحْمًا**’ which bears suffering as a victim and cannot stop thinking of him.” (II, 3, Centurio 1/77)

⁶ “I have written these things so they can serve as a checklist and so they can be useful for me and for all those who will read my book. I have drawn them from what I have understood while contemplating the Scriptures, from what I have heard from **truthful mouths**, and a little from **experience** itself (my own experience). May this be my relief, with the prayers of those who benefited from them, because they required.” (Deseille, I, 15/4; Bedjan, p. 127)

“Listen to what I still have to say; I've heard it being said without any lie...” (I, 15/5)

“But *Go to your room, stay up and pray secretly* goes in line with *Blessed are those who mourn*, because due to these tears and to the *tranquility* which makes the prayer clear, and due to this prayer, those who cry are comforted with a comfort that they cannot get with tears if we do not remain alone. In the world, as well, the same law governs tears: when we cry, we do not care about anything else, except for our tears, because we are disconnected from any other concern. Repentance is a lonely pain, which is only present in the heart that cannot be comforted, unless we find, within ourselves, a comfort for that which we mourn for. With the absence of exterior tears, hidden tears also exist and they are hidden in the *Thought*. Thus, the person who carries in his heart a continuous sorrow because of his sins, or the person whose heart is filled with sadness, remembering the humiliation of our Lord, or because of the sinful men, or perhaps because he grieves and suffers from the realities of heaven that he can’t wait for; such a man, not comforted by any earthly thing and not understanding what makes him suffer and what he is suffering for, can only be a continual “person who weeps” *أَكْثَرُ*, because, even with the absence of physical tears, he cries secretly (from his heart). As for the person who has one of these motives (to cry), the word *Blessed are those who mourn because they will be comforted* can be applied. Even though you get this consolation late, you, the experienced person who weeps, do not suffer. Before going out of this world, your happiness will rise up and detach you from your own body.” (II, 3, Centurio 4/74)

Already, in these quotes, the main reason behind our tears is, to some extent, justified. Man is a sinner, *concupiscent and irascible*, vulnerable towards any kind of temptations that confuse his soul and divert him from the pursuit of the main goal of his life, which is being with God. This is the reason behind the meaning of his suffering, his sorrows and his repentance. Concerned in the first place, the monk becomes a weeper⁷ *أَكْثَرُ* and his tears will constitute the main element that nourishes his body and his spirit.

The most important matter here is not sin or fear of the sin⁸ itself, which makes us suffer and cry, as reported by Isaac on several occasions, but it is a gift of love and solidarity with his race, which is not only composed of sinners, but also saints. Saints have already got their corroding share of pain, sacrifice and martyrdom to ensure a good transmission of faith⁹. Therefore, praying and crying with them and for them is in the same ritual of the mission of being Christian, witnesses of the authenticity of faith in Christ who cried for his friend Lazarus (I, 2/7), who was crucified and exalted to the right of the Father for our salvation. It

⁷ I, 85/32; Bedjan, p. 251-252 and II, 3; Centurio 4/74.

⁸ “It is not because we are afraid that we grow physical *labors* and we strive to have the awakened soul, but because we know that the comforts of the body pull us away from God, and also prevent our *Thought* from thinking of him whereas this is where our love to God is born in our soul...

“Thus, it is not because we are afraid of the punishment of hell that we respect these detailed rules and give them great care, and accomplishing them with zeal, but because they give us the opportunity of being with God and they preserve his souvenir inside us.” (II, 1/34; 36)

“The spiritual act of repentance, these are the tears of the hidden man poured in his heart when he understood the love of his Father, not when he is afraid of judgment. This is his occupation in his continuous meditation in God, in the hidden intersection of the *Thought* which bears suffering as a victim and cannot stop thinking of him.” (II, 3, Centurio 1/77)

⁹ “God, those who live for this world were never deemed worthy of *feeling* this knowledge, but only those who were dead in their earthly life were deemed to feel so, because of this good hope which is reserved for them who offered their prayers and tears to God at all times, pleading with an ardent love that no man would be excluded from these delights.” (II, 1/73)

seems undeniable that any physical or spiritual language, if applicable, is a collective motion regardless of the severity of the personal pain, or individual pain of the believer. Any member of the ecclesial corps, in physical or mental pain, makes the whole community suffer as a brother in faith and a Christlike face (Mt 25: 35-36; 42-43), or as Saint Paul witnessed it and gave a testimony about it (1 Co 13: 1) or (1 Co 12: 26). “If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it.” “Who suffers without me suffering with them? Who is it who threatens to become lost without me having great pain?”

After Origen, known by our Father through Evagrius¹⁰, an innovation was noticed in the patristic literature of weepers: the love of God, which replaces his justice on Judgment Day, is the only factor worthy of attention and development – and this is what we will notice later.

The second point to address in this framework is that real repentance, shown through tears, is done in loneliness and accompanied by sincere and pure prayer. Thus, the differentiation between good tears and bad tears, hidden tears, interior tears and other exterior tears emerges: the first tears spring from the heart and the thought, whereas the others flood the body. The human being is weeping in his entirety; he includes his tears, of the first category, in the register of different activities, motions and human abilities to express himself as an Adamite creature with three dimensions; the physical, mental and spiritual dimensions. Therefore, it is a matter of food, stability, continuous meditation, thought and practice of the virtue, tears and remembering death (I, 29); a matter of hard work, poverty, mortifications, continuous prayers, prostrations, humility, extended seclusion, *tranquility*, a strange situation for humans (II, 1, Centurio 2).

Isaac explains about the different types of exterior tears as follows:

“...The type [order] of tears that I speak of here is not that of which hesychasts rejoice by intervals: in fact, this consolation that follows them from time to time is common with all those who love with God in the *Hesychast* هَسِيحَا; it comes either when thought [*intelligence*] is in contemplation mode *t'wry'*, or while reading the Scriptures, or while praying. I speak here of this type [order] of tears flowing continuously day and night.” (I, 15/2)

He describes the tears of the heart:

“The spiritual act *rw̄honoy'* رَوَّهَوْنُو of repentance, these are the tears of the hidden man poured into his heart when he understands the love of his Father, not when he is afraid of judgment. This is his occupation in his continuous meditation in God, in the hidden intercession of the *Thought* which bears suffering as a victim and cannot stop thinking of him.” (II, 3, Centurio 1/77)

“Oh new sun, illuminate a lamp in my obscure *Thought*. Oh Christ who abolishes the cries of the Creation, give me hidden cries and tears that flow inside me...” (III, 7/36)

¹⁰ “Sitting in your cell... collect your thoughts. Think of the day of the death... be patient and zealous... Think also to what is happening now in hell, think how souls are over there, in what bitter silence they live... the endless tears of the souls! Keep think of these two things: the judgment of sinners; moan, cry and clothe yourself with compunction...” (Evagrius, I, PG § 9 1261 AC) quoted by A. Guillaumont, *Un philosophe au désert, Évagre le Pontique*, Paris, Vrin, 2009, P. 184. It is noteworthy that compunction, with Evagrius, is inseparable from the three other recommended spiritual exercises: fasting, watching and praying. *Ibid.*, p. 85.

Whether they were exterior or interior, the tears of Isaac are always a gift from God, creator and regenerator of human nature (I, 23/3; II, 5/11; II, 14/11). Fragile and vulnerable, human nature hides striking surprises about the indifference of some of the people under temptation towards the troubles of life. We can find the hypocrisy of *crocodile tears* or proudly giving up for *apathy*, this equanimity that freezes and dries out all sentimentality to be the first enemy of those who weep, and thus, an enemy of their spiritual progression. In fact, the physical is the element most concerned in all mystical approaches; and without it no motions لُؤَ or activities would succeed, especially psychological and intelligible activities.

While always approximating Evagrius¹¹, Isaac speaks of the tears that spring out the *šly'* لُؤَ , extremely far from searing *apathy*. However, the whole *šly'* is soaked with love, no matter how extreme his solitary situation was, because this is where is born the condensed *us* or the globalized *I*. The *šly'* of Isaac corresponds to the upper level of the ascetic spirituality of Evagrius where *gnosis* joins *praxis* to ensure that the equanimity of the soul, as a *final excellent state* and *the purity of the rational soul*, is always capable of *love, meekness, chastity, deafness*, and especially knowledge or science of the beings, exactly because the soul can never abandon the what is physical and sensible, the unique source of any *irritable* and *concupiscent* inclination and an invaluable support of intelligible and spiritual activities¹².

After this brief overview on the different types of tears, stating the source or efficient causes of these tears comes **secondly**. Isaac spoke of them with much confidence because he relies on the experience allowing him to indicate three of them in the famous chapter 18 of the collection II:

“4. *Where do continuous tears come from? (Isaac said) And on the subject of what is being told about some saints who never stopped crying:*

Continuous tears can have three reasons. Either they come from the *stupor* *temh'* لُؤَ coming from the full *intuition* of mysteries which are constantly revealed to the *Intellect*. Tears flow unintentionally without any feeling of pain on the part of the subject, because he scans (these mysteries) due to vision of an intellect *hawn'* لُؤَ seized with admiration of the knowledge given to him by spiritual intuition. These tears flow with the consent of the concerned persons and their violence never tires because their softness seized the *Intellect* due to their vision. This is what the Fathers saw symbolized by the manner the Sons of Israel ate with, and (the water) they drank from the rock which represents the Christ. It is the *Intuition* *swkl'* لُؤَ concerning the mysteries *roz'* لُؤَ , coming from the Spirit.”

“5. Or tears come from a certain passionate *love* لُؤَ for God, igniting the soul that we cannot handle anymore, without continuous crying, because of its sweetness and softness.”

¹¹ Always referring to Evagrius, Hausherr quotes: “The spirit of sloth hunts tears; the spirit of sadness destroy the oration... *Acedia* softens and weakens the soul, it even annihilates the force of bitterness, devouring its strength.” *De Oratione*, 12 ; in Hausherr, *op. cit.*, p. 18.

¹² See A. Guillaumont, *op. cit.*, p. 270-271.

“6. Or tears come from a great heart كَبْرًا *humility* كَمَلًا. Such humility can have two reasons. Either the exact knowledge of our sins, or remembering the humility of our Lord, or that of the Majesty of God, the Majesty of the Lord of everything who lowered himself to the point of speaking to human beings and educating them.” (II, 18/4-5-6)

Three qualities or three glorious gifts (II, 18/17) are, therefore, the roots of tears¹³ calling human beings to give themselves without any question, without any reply and without any justification. He is the target of the divine grace (I, 9/2; II, 18/12; II, 35/14). Humans can only consent to the reception of this long cherished gift, in order to enlighten their *intellect*, fascinate them and fill them with *stupor*. This type of spiritual intuition is the reward of the monk allows himself to go and renew himself in the pastures of the Lord, in order to be satisfied, reclaimed and, therefore, enabled to deserve the vision of the mysteries and the deep intuition of the reconstruction of the divine image made by the Holy Spirit.

This same Spirit warms the heart with an inexplicable heat¹⁴ allowing the sensitization of the streams of light which let tears flow by intervals, progressively with diligent preparation. The issue of the love of God is intimately linked to receiving spiritual intuitions and the modest availability of the individual. The movement of this process is undeniably comparable to both movements of ascent and descent. God always takes the initiative to touch the heart of man; however, the latter has to respond and to be available to receive the whole package. Or, in order to succeed, the *sine qua non* condition is the humility supported by a deep conviction of finiteness, shouldered with a conscious attitude of change and openness to the grace, called love; that of loving and being loved.

The fact remains that this humility that we find with Isaac is a cause different to that of knowing our sins. It is remembering the blessings of our Lord, his power and his love for mankind. Far from the Platonic theory, the memory concerned is an updated anamnesis at all times, especially since it is projected into the future, in order to inquire about the day of our death and the Judgment Day, as a call for vigilance and for gaining salvation. We can put forward the expression *the economy of memory*, where the salvation of those who can remember is consecrated. Remembering or bringing to mind the event of salvation means going suddenly beyond the limits of space and time to join, in a historical *hic et nunc*, the whole timelessness of the eternal Subject in his ineffable coming out of himself towards the world of sense. The divine action goes beyond historic events and is included in the duration guaranteeing all life possibilities. This intuition, unconditionally and freely granted to

¹³ “As for you, if you own neither the humility of the heart nor the smooth and fiery pain in the love of God, which are the root of these tears which spread a sweet consolation in the heart and do not appeal the nature that would hamper them...” (II, 18/14)

¹⁴ “This vision is called contemplation (*théôria*). This contemplation gives birth to the (spiritual) warmth, and from this warmth, the grace (*charis*) of contemplation is born, and they originate behind tears. In the beginning, it was only on a low degree: during the same day, tears come and go many times. Though, later, their flow becomes continuous, and through this continuous flow, the soul achieves peace of thought. Through this peace of thought, the soul is raised to the purity of the intellect. With this purity of intellect, man becomes able to witness the mysteries of God...” (I, 9/1; Bedjan, p. 127-128)

Although this can be a misplaced comparison, I would like to quote Ruzbehân Bâqli: “Then I will return to my boutique where I will stay until dawn a prey to ecstasy and agitation, moaning and weeping hot tears.” *Diaire* (Henry Corbin), *Le dévoilement des secrets*, written from 1181 to 1204 (*Journal*, 9). See *Les cahiers d'Orient et d'Occident*, Bimonthly Letter, no. 9, July/August 2007, p. 5.

mankind fills his eyes with continuous tears, warms his heart and calls him to recognize his finiteness and also to recognize his election and vocation.

Thirdly, Isaac brought about an innovation in his own way, when he talked about tears as a sign, as a place, as a region and border, and more precisely as a baptismal fountain.

“When you reach the region of tears, you have to know that your thought (intelligence) has freed itself from the prison of this world, that it reached the threshold of the new world and that it has started to breathe the aroma of this wonderful new air. Thus, it starts to bring out the tears. The birth of a spiritual newborn is closer [because the gestation of the spiritual child gets closer] and the grace, the same mother of all, hastes to crave in this soul a *sign* [a divine sign ܐܝܘܒܐ] (which makes it capable of seeing) the light of the coming world¹⁵. When the time of the birth comes, the intellect (intelligence) starts to show some movements originated in this new world, such as when the newborn starts breathing outside his mother’s womb. Since he cannot handle this unusual environment, it pushes the body to shed tears; tears that are as sweet as honey. When the ‘newborn’ inside the person develops, tears flow more and more. However, the type of tears that I speak of here is not that of which hesychasts rejoice by interval: in fact, this consolation, which comes occasionally, is common for all those who live with God in the *šly*’ ܫܠܝܐ; either it comes when the *thought* [intelligence] is in the contemplation mode, or when *reading the Scriptures*, or while *praying*. However, I speak here of this type of tears which flow without interruption, day and night.”

“Anyone who has truly and authentically experienced these things [the meaning of these modes] has found them in the *šly*’ ܫܠܝܐ. His eyes have become like fountains of tears [water sources] ܡܘܢܝܐ ܡܘܢܝܐ, for two years or more. Afterwards, he entered in the *peace of thoughts*; then, from the peace of thoughts, he entered into this *rest* (*katapausin*) which St. Paul spoke of (*See He* 4, 3), partially and as nature can bear. Following this peaceful rest, the intellect [intelligence] starts to *contemplate the mysteries*. Therefore, the Holy Spirit starts to reveal divine things to him, God lives in him and makes the fruit of the Spirit bloom inside him. All this makes him foresee, darkly and like an enigma, the *future change* that our interior nature will witness when everything is renewed.” (I, 12/2-3; Bedjan, p. 126-127)

“This is the *sign* which will show you if you have entered the place you wanted and which will prevent you from leaving it. When the grace starts to open your eyes, in order to make you experience the true contemplation of realities, abundant tears start pouring that often clog your cheeks. Then, the battle of the senses soothes and decreases inside you. If someone teaches you the opposite, do not believe them. Indeed, apart from tears, do not seek any more evident *sign* that the body can give you. However, when the intellect reaches higher than creatures, the body also reaches higher than any emotion, higher than any sensation.” (I, 23/13; Bedjan, p. 49¹⁶)

¹⁵ The use of the Greek text changes everything because the sign is actually a sacrament and the text translation that seems the most loyal to the Syriac text is: “The grace, mother of all, rushes to give birth, in mystery ܐܝܘܒܐ, the soul image of God, in the light of the future world.” (Bedjan, p. 126-127)

¹⁶ “Shedding tears during prayer is a sign that the soul has received the divine mercy due to repentance, which has been accepted, and that this person, through his tears has started to enter the plains of purity...” (I, 33/11)

“*Question* – What are the specific *indications* and clear signs, starting from which and through which we feel that we have started to see the hidden fruit in the soul?”

Answer – It is when a man is deemed worthy of receiving the grace of tears that flow abundantly and without exerting any effort. That is because tears were placed as a *boundary* between the physical and the spiritual, between subjection to passion and purity. However, as long as we haven’t received such a charisma, the spiritual activity of each person is also located in the exterior man and the work of that hiding in the spiritual man cannot be felt. It is when we start to abandon the physical things of the present century that we will have crossed the *boundary* and that we have started to move forward in the *region* extending far beyond visible nature, that we suddenly receive the grace of tears. Tears appear since the first stage of hidden life and they take the man to the perfection of the love of God. The more he gets closer to that perfection, the more he becomes rich with tears until they blend with his food and beverage (See *Ps*, 101, 10); that is how much they abound. This is the exact *sign* that the spirit has gone out of this world and that it has the sensation of the spiritual world. Though, the more human beings get closer in their thought to the present world, the more tears become rare, and when their thought is totally deprived of tears, it is the *sign* that humans are completely buried in the passions.” (I, 85, 22; Bedjan, p. 244-245)

A careful reading of these texts guides us towards a sacramental background unveiled-hidden by signs and conveyed by what we wanted to call *the ritual of tears*. In fact, referring to the texts of liturgical rituals, especially the sacramental rituals, we can say that these play the role of a sign to even reveal to us and make visible an invisible reality. However, this revelation is hardly limited to the use of reason only; rather, it affects the human being physically, psychologically, spiritually and mentally. If the immersion in the baptismal water is the sign of death and resurrection with the Glorious Christ and the oil anointing¹⁷, the sign of confirmation by power and the gift of the Holy Spirit, shedding tears like a “baptismal fountain¹⁸”, if applicable, will be the sign of the new birth, of crossing from one place to another, from one region to another and from one existential state to another. Therefore, we can say it is a new creation¹⁹. Crossing the *boundary thūm* ’ *أَسْفَا* of tears states that emphatic change occurs that cannot be more beautiful.

As long as we linger below it, the boundary remains a goal to reach, a fountain to fill or empty. However, as soon as we reach the other side, it stops existing, because in the beyond,

¹⁷ “There are tears that burn, tears that are similar to oil anointing. All tears coming from compunction and heart pain caused by committed sins, dry out and burn the body, and often, when they flow, they prevent human beings from controlling themselves. These are, first, such tears that humans necessarily shed. Then, through these, the gate leading to tears from the second level opens up for them; this second level, better than the first, is the land of joy where human beings receive mercy. These tears spring out of conscience, they dress the body with beauty and they are like an oil ointment, they flow alone without having to force them out. As I just said, they do not only strengthen the human body, but also their aspect changes: “When the heart is happy, says the Scripture, the face glooms, but when the heart is sad, the face darkens.” (*Prov* 15, 13) (I, 85/23).

¹⁸ “Thoughts that come spontaneously and without reflection to the hesychasts transform their eyes into baptismal fountains through tears that flow and abundantly bathe their cheeks.” (I, 29/7; Bedjan p. 245)

¹⁹ In this framework, I would like to refer quickly to the Oriental mythology, the Egyptian and Hindu mythologies, to find tracks of creation through tears: Re the highest god has gone out of the egg and was blinded by light. This light made his eyes shed tears and this is where the first men came from. In India, the tears of demiurge Prajāpati are the origin of the creation of the world.

we do not cry like we used to do before²⁰. Distinguishing between two modes of existing, two ways of existing and two spaces to explore and live in, is a ritual in which the procession starts somewhere and continues uphill and down dale to finally end up in the garden of wonders²¹.

What Isaac speaks of, in his sacramentary teaching after Gregory of Nazianzus²², is a double movement where there are actually two boundaries *thūm* ‘*ثُمَّ*’ to be crossed. Firstly, he speaks of birth, the passage from an embryonic life to normal life, deeply marked by cries and tears. When we are in the womb of our mother, we do not know tears; we exist in a vegetative, instinctive and dependent life²³. However, as soon as we cross to the other side, cries announce the passage and the liberation of someone who does not participate in the birth. Although this step is thought up by the mystics, it only succeeds when it prepares for the second birth in Spirit where the path becomes progressively less rugged, which means it is a place where we cry less and it is *customized* to express joy, love and the fragrance of heavenly honey.

Finally, we can add that Isaac, amazed by the sweetness of divine love, subjugates us and forces us to follow it on its path. He makes us really believe in its experience and its teaching, or his *lachrymatory spiritual agriculture* (inspired from *Ps* 125). Being absorbed by *amazement* *tehr* ‘*تَهْر*’, which insights are *undermined* by the Spirit, and motions submerged in a deep *drunkenness*, distinguishing neither the body nor the soul, not remembering anything, elevated to the outside of this world, not praying anymore, becoming a *gaze* hit by *stupor* *temh* ‘*تَمْه*’, he finds *šly* ‘*سَلَى*’, an ascetic of thought and immaterial contemplation, and finally an unwavering smile to match his teachings, because the *Πενηθος* is the Master as said by the Fathers²⁴.

In his ritual of tears, Isaac effectively and substantially reinterprets the whole theological and Christological meaning of our baptism, which makes us rise as sons of God’s Kingdom. In case tears continue to flow, from time to time, it is not an *indication* of failure, non-transparency or impurity, but it is because we remain humans and sons of God. Our baptismal tears raise the *boundary* between the two *regions* and submerge them with continuous flows to destroy them and erase them in the same time. The two movements studied above are, in

²⁰ “5. Listen to what I have to say; I learnt that from a **truthful mouth**. When you will enter the region (country) of peace of thought, you will be deprived from the abundance of tears **and you will not get them** except for a certain measure and at an opportune time. This is, in truth and as a summary, what the whole Church believes (on this matter).” (I, 15/5; Bedjan, p. 127)

²¹ It is noteworthy that space plays a central role in Isaac’s imaginary world, which is worthy of a specific study (this is what I have already done in my studies).

²² For Gregory of Nazianzus, tears constitute the fifth baptism after the baptism of Moses, the baptism in water, that of John the Baptist and the fourth is the baptism of blood and martyrdom; in *Sanctum Baptisma*, no. 9, col. 369, Saint Ephraim always speaks of baptism in the penitential context of purification. See Hausherr, *op. cit.*, p. 44.

²³ “If the heat that you feel cools down without any exterior reason, just like a body sickness, explain this change as woe betide you!...It means that you have fell into the trap of pride, neglect or sagging.” (I, 56/21; Bedjan, p. 94)

²⁴ See Hausherr, *op. cit.*, p. 92.

conclusion, found diluted in love which is generated by the *vision* and *purity* of the thought in a diligent application of the *work* (labor) فَعْمًا of the *tranquility*²⁵. Prayer becomes a *luminous conversation* with God who fills the eyes with tears and makes the soul rejoice with joy of clarity šapywt' مَعْمًا in order to, finally, feel that we are “in the middle of the resurrection of the righteous²⁶”.

²⁵ II, 1/52.

²⁶ II, 1/43.

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