



We Have “Earned” A New Tefillah Voice

We associate the iconic practice of viduy with the overall process of teshuvah. Verbal confession of sins enables us to more directly face our failures and, hopefully, achieve authentic teshuvah.

However, there is a second, less dramatic process of viduy, unrelated to teshuvah. During Pesach of the 4th and 7th year of a 7-year shemittah cycle, viduy ma’asrot is performed, essentially conducting inventory of the agricultural gifts which we delivered to Kohanim and Levi’im over the past three-year cycle. This viduy doesn’t confess sins but certifies our successful provision of charity. It reminds us that tzedakah isn’t merely altruistic but obligatory. Every three years we must personally account for our Torah-obligated charities.

This “inventory” viduy concludes with a tefillah for national prosperity and for the welfare of the Land of Israel. This post-viduy prayer is prefaced with a very intriguing phrase. The term השקיפה loosely translates into a request that Hashem “gaze” down upon us from Heaven and deliver the expected berachot.

Oddly, this phrase isn’t prefaced with any introduction. Typical tefillot are introduced with a preamble of humility. Expressing

our dependence upon Hashem, extolling His glory, or pleading that He accept our flawed tefillot all demonstrate humility before prayer commences. Without any preamble of humility tefillah becomes ego-centric and disrespectful of Hashem.

Strangely, the term השקיפה launches our post-viduy tefillah without any preface. Without any introduction this tefillah sounds more like a demand than a request. What right do we have to lodge a demand of Hashem?

A DIFFERENT VOICE

Evidently, in the aftermath of our tzedakah, tefillah takes on a different complexion. The basic “package” of matanot, or charity to Kohanim and Levi’im, exceeds 20% of our overall agricultural haul. Beyond these specific gifts, we also donated sizable portions of meat from both ritual korbanot as well as from non-ritual meat. First-born animals or *bechor*, first fruits or *bikurim*, and gifts of shorn wool or *resihit hagez* round out an extensive list of charities to the Kohanim, in total no small percentage of our “earnings”.

The viduy ceremony celebrates our philanthropy and our selflessness. Having successfully completed a three-year cycle

of altruism we earn the right to speak with Hashem differently. Having performed His duties, we can now ask him to serve our needs.

As Rashi comments, by employing the term השקיפה we effectively claim to Hashem “

עשינו מה שגזרת עלינו, עשה אתה מה שעליך לעשות

We have fulfilled your duties, now You “should” perform yours. Through our devotion to mitzvot, we have earned the right to assert the השקיפה, without any preamble.

Specifically, regarding the mitzvah of tzedakah, we are allowed, and even encouraged to be more frontal, and even more transactional with Hashem. Typically, we don’t condition mitzvah performance upon divine reciprocity. We perform mitzvot, as the mishna exhorts “without expectation of reward”. Yet, the gemara allows us to condition our charity upon Hashem providing reward:

האומר סלע זו לצדקה בשביל שיחיו בני ובשביל שאזכה בה לחיי העולם הבא הרי זה צדיק גמור

A person may donate contingent upon Hashem healing a family member. In the context of viduy ma’aser, after delivering tzedakah, over a three-year interval, we merit the right to be more frontal in lodging expectations of Hashem. Past performance changes the tonality of tefillah... especially when we are davening for Am Yisrael, and not for our own personal needs.

CHASSIDUT AND TEFILLAH

Traditionally, tefillah was characterized by humility and subservience. The Shulchan Aruch encourages a tefillah posture similar to a “slave standing before

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a master”, with hands clenched together; other opinions instruct the polite folding of arms behind our backs. Either way, clasping hands or folding arms demonstrates submissiveness.

Chassidut radically altered tefillah posture and tefillah tonality. Stressing our unbreakable bond with Hashem and our shatterproof love of Him, Chassidut envisioned tefillah as an intimate encounter and a conversation. Hands were no longer tightly folded in obedience but thrust to Heaven, outstretched and flaying, speaking with Hashem and lodging frontal “requests”.

Reb Levi’s Famous “Trick” A well-known story about Rav Levi Yitzchak of Berdichev exemplifies this newfound voice of tefillah. One year, toward the end of Ne’ilah, Reb Levi, the chazan, abruptly

halted the tefillah. Frozen in silence, he stood quietly, even as the sun was quickly setting on Yom Kippur. Finally, as the day was about to conclude, he hastily blurted out the final beracha of Ne'ilah.

When questioned after Yom Kippur about his odd behavior, he explained that he had detected that his prayers were spurned in Heaven. There was no purpose in offering [which would just glance off the gates of shomayim.

Desperate for a solution, he recalled a trick he and his siblings had played upon their mother. She stored her candies in a locked closet, distributing them to her children, sparingly, for good behavior. Little Reb Levi and his siblings would manipulate her for extra candy by hurriedly blurring a beracha. She was left with no choice but to offer them candy, else the beracha would have been uttered in vain.

Faced with this predicament Reb Levi reproduced his childhood ruse, this time with Hashem. Quickly blurring the final beracha of Ne'ilah he wanted to "coerce" Hashem to forgive us, so that the beracha asking for forgiveness would not be in vain. Essentially, he "manipulated" Hashem with a boyhood trick. You have

to feel very close with Hashem to play that trick. So close that you realize that Hashem actually desires that trick. Chassidim felt that intimacy and that confidence.

MODERN TEFILLAH

Living toward the end of history we must also find that voice. Time has passed since we were evicted from Yerushalayim. During that time, we have been through so much. History challenged us like no other, and we stood tall, firmly preserving Hashem's presence in a tortured world, at great cost.

Toward the tail-end of history we faced two mammoth challenges. We suffered the greatest genocide in history and pulled ourselves out of that nightmare to rebuild a rich and robust Jewish world. A few years after that horror we were tasked with resettling our Homeland against a ferocious international wave of opposition. We have so much to be proud of.

Like our ancestors after viduy ma'aser, we too have earned the right to daven in a more frontal manner. We, like them, ask Hashem, unabashedly, to look down from Heaven upon His children and bless them and their newly recovered Homeland.

השקיפה !! ■



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