

Parashat Ki Tavo, Rabbi James Proops

We read in this week's *parasha* of *Ki Tavo*, the fact that *Bnei Yisrael* cried out to Hashem during their slavery in *Mitzrayim*. However it is noted that the *pasuk* does not recount that Hashem heard our prayers but rather it states, “וַנִּצְעַק אֶל-ה' אֱלֹהֵינוּ אֶת-קוֹלנוּ וַיִּשְׁמַע ה' אֶת-קוֹלנוּ - We cried to Hashem God of our fathers, and Hashem heard our voices”(26:7). Was it not the *tefillot* of the *Bnei Yisrael* that Hashem ‘heard’ and took note of? Why does the Torah emphasise the words ‘crying’ and ‘voices’ rather than prayer?

The Chofetz Chaim remarks that it is the ‘mere’ crying out in times of trouble or danger that is accepted by Hashem. Meaningful tears are the more powerful form of reaching out to God. On the *pasuk* in *parashat Vaera* (2:23), which our *parasha* is referencing, Rabbeinu Bachayei (d.1340) writes the following:

“Even though the time of the redemption had arrived, they weren't worthy of being redeemed. However, once they all cried out in unison from the work that they were undergoing, their *tefillot* were accepted... This is to teach you that the *tefillah* of a person is only complete when one cries out from the pain and stress that are contained within one's heart. This type of *tefillah* is more accepted by Hashem than mere lip service.”

As we continue through yet another month of this most challenging pandemic, with new cases of the virus coming to light throughout the Jewish community, we must all ask ourselves to what extent have we truly cried out to Hashem? To different degrees we are all fearful for our and our family's health. We are all desperate for life to resume a sense of normalcy. We look to the pharmaceutical companies for a vaccine and to the scientists, physicians and health advisors for greater insight and advice as to how we should be going about our daily lives. But have we cried out to Hakadosh Baruch Hu to bring us out of this situation? Have we called out to God from the depths of our heart to free us from the slavery of this pandemic?

As Rabbeinu Bachayei writes, we are not talking about muttering lip service as we quickly utter the set *teffilot* or *tehillim*, but have we taken time to gather together

our thoughts and really open up to Hashem and cry out for this to be over? There are numerous ways in which we can do this. In our daily *shemonah esrei* we can utilize the paragraph of *Refaeinu* to pray for those who are afflicted. In the paragraph of *Shema Koleinu* we can pause from our recitation of the text and in our own words beseech Hashem to bring us, our community and the world out of this most trying time. Beyond our scheduled *tefillah*, we can and should be encouraged to carve out time in our day to privately call out to God in any way we feel comfortable, opening up from the depths of our emotions and feelings, and pray for this situation to be brought to its conclusion. The Chofetz Chaim points out the power of praying immediately after the performance of a *mitzvah*, hence the inclusion of the ‘*Harachaman*’ requests after the *brakhot* of *Birkhat HaMazon*.

Contained in our *parahsa* is also what is referred to as “*Vidui Maserot* - The Confession of the Tithes”, that must be proclaimed following the taking of tithes from one’s crops. The proclamation states (26:13), “בְּעֲרַתִּי הַקֹּדֶשׁ מִן־הַבַּיִת וְגַם נִתְתִּיר” - I have removed the holy things from the house, and I have also given it to the Levite, to the proselyte, to the orphan and to the widow, according to all the commandments that You have commanded me, I have not transgressed any of your commandments and I have not forgotten”. The *Mishnah* asks what is it that we have ‘not forgotten’ and answers that it means “I have not forgotten to be conscious of my gratitude to You (*Maaser Sheni* 5). Why does a Jew who has followed the word of God and given up three tenths of his produce to the poor and willingly embarked on a great journey across *Eretz Yisrael* to *Yerushalayim* which itself is a manifestation of his gratitude to Hashem, needs to declare and therefore be reminded to be conscious of and thankful to Hashem?

An explanation is given which serves as the paradigm for many *Divrei Torah* and *drashot* offered by *Rabbanim* throughout the ages. Often a Rabbi or teacher is criticized for ‘preaching to the choir’ and they are urged to focus on those who are less committed and connected. Those people who attend shul (or who read the *drasha!*) are not the ones who need to hear the message. While there is truth that we all have a responsibility to reach out to those who are not as connected, we see

from the *Vidui Maserot*, that it is the committed and faithful Jew who needs to be constantly reminded of the demands of his faith. It is us, who are reading this, that need to recognize the responsibility that rests on our shoulders.

It is incumbent upon those who already *daven* and who are already taking our Torah obligations seriously, to step up and cry out. On Rosh Hashana the whole world is judged, but how many of the world's 7.8 billion people are appealing to God on *Yom HaDin*? Of the 14.8 million Jews for whom *Rosh Hashana* is significant, how many actually take it seriously?

It is up to us, those Jews who are steadfast in our belief and faith, to call out to Hashem with all our voices and tears, that He leads us into a new year that is blessed with good health and prosperity for all. Now is the time for Him to hear our cries.