

Confession and Commitment

In the opening of this week's Torah portion, *Ki Tavo*, we read about some of Israel's agricultural responsibilities. The society would not strictly capitalize and feast on its largess; Israel would be a culture and community that tithed, gave its gifts to the poor, and recognized God as instrumental in the process of its material success.

Concurrent with the performance of tithing, the tither was charged to make a verbal declaration, known as the confession of tithing, *vidduy ma'aser*. This text: "I have brought the holy things out of my house, and have given them to the Levite, the stranger, the orphan, and the widow...I have not transgressed your commandments, nor have I forgotten them...I have listened to the voice of the Lord...Look down from your holy habitation, from heaven, and bless your people Israel..." (Deut 26:13-15)

The theme of confession is particularly relevant to the High Holiday season. The repentance process was a natural, socially expected part of spiritual remediation and the recovery of communal harmony. But, as with all normative ritual practice, routine often plagues sincerity. In halachik literature, the essence of the process of repentance is the confession. (See Maimonides', *Laws of Repentance*, 1:1) Here too, like tithing, the repentant must make a verbal declaration: "Please God, I have sinned before You; I have committed such and such a wrong; I regret and feel ashamed at what I have done and I will never again commit this wrong." (See Maimonides', *ibid*) This declaration aims to take the perfunctory gesture of repentance and, by personalizing it, transforming it into a sincere religious commitment.

However, the confession of sin and the confession of tithing differ in a key fashion. After we commit the transgression, we pronounce the confession in an effort to concretize our feelings of remorse and commitment to change. This confession is strictly about repairing the past and improving the future.

The confession of the tithes is very different. That is a declaration of success. It is a proud pronouncement of fealty to religious dictates; an expression of harmony with the Divine word. Where feelings of guilt, shame and remorse attend the confession of sin, feeling of pride, joy and confidence attend the confession of the tithe.

As we approach the High Holiday season, we might infuse our confession of sin with the confession of tithing. Yes, we regret our past errors and we must work hard to do better and to be better. But we must also trumpet our successes; we must be able to find the pride from what we've done in support of brothers and sisters in Israel; we must feel inspired by our growth in our life of prayer; we must feel a thirsting for more and

greater intellectual dynamism that comes from the pursuit of Torah study; we must feel the empathic pull of our heart strings when we visit the sick or support the impoverished. Confession does not only pull us from our habitual carelessness. Confession can also be a confidence building expression of commitment.

Shabbat Shalom Umevorach,
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