



DIVREI MENACHEM

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In Answer to A Question

In our Parsha's opening lines, we learn of two legal institutions: the declaration of the pilgrim bringing First Fruits and his "confession" when offering tithes. The verbal statements are expressions of gratitude to Hashem for His bounty. Following Rav Hirsch, these proclamations also teach us to employ our material resources for the noble purposes Hashem has set before us.

Of interest, of all the first fruit offerings and tithes, *Ma'aser Oni*, the levy designated for the poor, should have the most profound impact on us existentially. For the root letters of the Hebrew term *ONI* – Ayin, Nun, and Yud – referring to the poor, comprise the same root as the term *Ve'ANita*, employed in the ceremony of the First Fruits.

For after the pilgrim places the fruits before the Kohen (who then sets them before the altar), the pilgrim utters his declaration in the spirit of the Torah's injunction: "*VE'ANITA Ve'amarta Lifnei Hashem Elokecha.*" What does this term *VE'ANITA* mean?

Literally, it means "and you shall answer." But did anyone ask a question? So, one translation offers that the pilgrim *begins* his declaration (Silberman), while Rav Hirsch

posits that the pilgrim *makes a profession* or confession (*Vidui*). In that spirit, the term appears to confer upon the pilgrim an overriding sense of poverty, imagined or otherwise, material or spiritual.

This line of thinking is supported by the fact that in the declaration, the pilgrim recalls how our forefathers were subjected to life-threatening situations that almost ruined them (Lavan the Aramean, famine, exile, persecution). Much depends on how one interprets the term *OVED* in the following phrase, "*Arami Oved Avi*," primarily because the word is associated with loss and destruction. Now, with thanks to Hashem, the pilgrim asserts that only because of Hashem's beneficence were we saved and brought to Eretz Yisrael.

So the pilgrim did answer a question, one he asked himself. And he concluded that we are all impoverished because all our material assets are ultimately *gifts* from Hashem; in a flash, He could deprive us of them! So, consequently, he asks himself if he had attended appropriately to all the "tithes" due to the topsy-turvy world in which he lived.

Like the pilgrim, we might want to thank Hashem for saving us from poverty and ruin. So then, in the Torah's words, we can rejoice "in every good thing that God has given us." ■

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