



REBBETZIN SHIRA SMILES

FACULTY, OU ISRAEL CENTER

Life

It is generally accepted that we may not ask for personal requests within the first three brachot of the *Shemoneh Esrei* since they are dedicated to praising Hashem. How then can we ask, “*Zachreinu le’chaim*—Remember us for life,” in our tefillah during the *Aseret Yemei Teshuvah*, the ten days from Rosh Hashanah to Yom Kippur? Asking for life seems quite personal!

The Vilna Gaon *zt”l* explains that since we ask for “*chaim*—life” and not “*chaim tovim*—good life,” we can say that the request refers to life in the next world, because by definition the next world is all good. This is a spiritual request, thus it is permitted to be added within the first three brachot.

The *Ramchal* *zt”l* in *Ma’amar Hachochmah* also teaches that this a spiritual request; the intention is the desire to be written in the Book of the Righteous, who are considered perpetually alive even after they leave this physical world. Yet, how can we ask to be written in this lofty book? Wouldn’t that depend on whether we deserve such exaltedness?

We can apply the following approach based on a *Midrash* in *Shir Hashirim*. Hashem invites us to initiate the teshuvah process with the smallest symbol, something as small as the eye of a needle, and Hashem will expand that opening greatly with a heightened Divine arousal to turn heavenward. A heartfelt request to be written in the book of *tzadikim* is such an opening, prompting Hashem, so to speak, to increase our momentum toward full teshuvah. However, we must appeal to Hashem earnestly, with a genuine desire reflected in true action that aligns us with His will.

This theme is echoed in the Rosh Hashanah tefillah, “*U’vechen ten pachdecha*—Instill



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your awe.” We pray for *yirat shamayim*, a ‘small opening,’ an expression of true desire to achieve closeness, and a request for Hashem’s help to succeed.

To be sure, one’s deepest aspirations characterize his spiritual caliber. Rabbeinu Yonah *zt”l* notes that one who truly wants to learn from others, even if his knowledge is limited, is called a *chacham*, a wise one. Merely appreciating and desiring wisdom indicates the presence of true wisdom. Similarly, the direction a chamber in the Beit Hamikdash faced determined its status of *kedushah*. If a chamber faced the *Kodesh*, the Holy Chamber where the service took place, it had the status of *kedushah*, even if was situated in an area of lesser holiness, while a chamber whose opening faced towards the area of lesser holiness, did not have the same status of *kedushah* even if it was in the *Kodesh*.

“*Zachreinu le’chaim*” is a request not for physical life nor for a spiritual life filled with habitual mitzvot. Rather, it is an earnest plea for a life devoted to “*Melech chafeitz bachaim*.” The intensity of one’s spiritual yearnings on Rosh Hashanah will be mirrored in the *siyata dishmaya* that he will receive over the course of the year to reach these heights.

May we merit such sincerity, worthy of Hashem’s bountiful blessings and indeed be written in the book of the *tzadikim*. ■

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