

Gaze down from Your abode, from the heavens and bless Your people Yisrael. (26:15)

Rashi explains that this prayer implies: “Hashem, we have carried out Your wishes. We have done that what You decreed upon us; now, You do what behooves You.” The word *hashkifah*, “gaze (down)” is unique in that it is almost always used to denote careful examination to determine the appropriate punishment. In other words, it is not used in connection with something positive about to occur. *Rashi* observes this in his commentary to *Bereishis* 18:16, *Vayashkifu al pnei Sodom*; “They (the angels) gazed towards Sodom.” The angels who had come to visit and participate in the healing of Avraham *Avinu*, now gazed on the city which would be their next stop – the city in whose destruction they would participate. Apparently, the *hashkifah* of *Viduy Maaser* is different (as explained by the commentators), because when Jews contribute to the poor (when Jews act as they should, being kind and compassionate to their fellow Jew), the *Middas HaDin*, Attribute of Strict Justice, is transformed into *Middas HaRachamim*, the Attribute of Mercy.

It makes sense, but is it necessary to distinguish between the two instances of “gazing” between the gazing on Sodom, and Hashem’s gazing down on us? Apparently, since the distinction is made, it indicates that some commonality between the *hashkifah* of *Viduy Maaser* and that of Sodom must exist. What could this possibly be?

Horav Elazar HaKohen Kahanov, zl, explains that the angels who gazed at Sodom did so for a good reason. Actually, it was of a positive nature. Prior to punishing a person, especially a large community, it must be discerned whether they are sinners or they committed a sin, an external act of iniquity, which does reflect upon their actual *hashkafah*, outlook, perspective, on life and living. In other words, to put it simply: Are they evil, or did they just commit an act of evil? Why did the people of Sodom act in such a reprehensible manner? Was it caused by outrage: they simply could not tolerate outsiders, especially beggars who came to take their hard-earned money? Was their sin a temporary lapse, an error in judgement, a one-time deferment to the wiles of the *yetzer hora*, evil-inclination? Or was it their outlook, the way of life that they chose for themselves? When it is a temporary lapse caused by an extraneous influence, there is hope. If, however, it is already imbedded in one’s *hashkafatah*, it is much deeper than a simple deviation. This person is evil incarnate. He deserves the ultimate punishment.

We know from studying *Chazal* that the evil of Sodom was no walk in the park; it was no temporary lapse. These people had developed an entire *hashkafah*, outlook, of evil. *Chesed*, acts of lovingkindness, were an anathema to them, a symbol of weakness. They waged war with kindness; they despised goodness. For such people, whose *hashkafas ha’chaim*, outlook on life, is so perverted, there is only one solution: they have no place in society.

The *hashkifah* that accompanies *Viduy Maaser* is also about outlook – a Jew’s outlook, a Jew’s *hashkafah*, a Jew’s true way of life. While it is true that we all have temporary lapses,

downfalls which must be corrected, our intrinsic *hashkafah*, our outlook on life, is replete with compassion and sensitivity for our fellow. When we bring our *matanos*, gifts for the *Kohen*, *Levi* and *ani*, poor man, we do so out of pride, love and empathy. We come to the *Bais Hamikdash*, our hearts filled with joy, bursting with enthusiasm and excitement, knowing that we are carrying out Hashem's Will wholeheartedly. No one is bending our arms, because this is who we are. Thus, we ask Hashem to *hashkifah*, gaze down from upon High, and observe that our actions are a reflection of our true selves.

Yes, a connection exists between the *hashkafas/gazing* of the angels to that which we ask Hashem to do concerning our *matanos*. They both focus on the true essence, the *hashkafah*, of the person. Sodom's *hashkafah* warranted their destruction. We pray that our *hashkafah* will be our source of merit for life, good health and spiritual reward.