

# **Pesach: Command Appearance**

- Nisson Shulman.

We come to Shul in a "getting" mood; we want to get nahas, beracha, simcha, health, parnasa... What are we willing to "give" in return? But that is the theme of the holiday, "Lo yeraeh panai reikam..."

COMMAND APPEARANCE  
FOR ANY DAY OF YOM TOV, AND APPROPRIATE FOR YIZKOR AND AN APPEAL

We come to synagogue to pray and to be inspired.

Some come daily, some come weekly, and some come less frequently.

There were "synagogues", gathering places in ancient times too, where we prayed, even during the time the Holy Temple stood in Jerusalem. There the people came when they were not within distance of the Holy Temple. There, also, they studied, as we study in many synagogues today.

But three times a year we appeared at the Holy Temple in Jerusalem, commanded by God there to be seen. We would have to come from all over the land. We would appear at these three pilgrim festivals, Pesach, Sukkot, Shavuoth, because God commanded us to appear. "Shalosh peamim bashana yerae kol zechurcha et pnei Hashem Elokecha".

Coming at this time was different. We would come to be blessed by the Lord for the year. Just as we come this day praying for God's blessing and that He would watch over our near ones and dear ones.

Now when we come before the Lord on this festival in our synagogue, we consider it the same, as when then we came to Jerusalem's Holy Temple, for the synagogue is the Mikdash Me'at, the miniature sanctuary.

How should we appear before the Lord? The Torah tells us how: "Lo yerae panay rekam. Ish kematnat yado asher berach Hashem Elokecha". We may not see the Lord empty handed. Each man must come with the gifts of his hand according to the blessing of the Lord our God.

We came with feast offerings, but they were only symbols of the real gifts we brought, gifts of the heart, gifts of sincere heart service, and of dedicating ourselves before the Almighty, such gifts as we may well bring this day before the Lord our God.

We often come to the synagogue in much the wrong mood! We come in a getting mood! We want to get blessing. We want God to give us health and happiness, joy and gladness. We want nachas, we want a daughter's marriage, a son's success. We want a child's devotion, a husband's love, and a wife's tenderness. We want tranquility, we want sustenance, we want even wealth and honour. We want recognition. We want... we want... all this and much more.

But what are we prepared to give in return? Are our hands open to give as well as to receive?

There is a remarkable mechilta, amended by the Gaon of Vilna, on the passage commanding our appearance before the Lord our God. “Ma simcha haamura leadam berauy lo, af reiya haamura lagavoha barauy Lo!”

The MECHILTA says that just as gladness, the simcha a man wants, is according to what is suitable to him, so the appearance before the Lord must be according to what is suitable to Him. Quid pro Quo! No free gifts here! Here there must be payment for value received!

You want all those wonderful things from the Lord. You want Him to reward you suitably. Are you indeed suited for a reward? Have you extended yourself towards the Almighty, suitably?

What can a person give to the Lord? A thought ... that he ought to return closer to Him. A moment of prayer.... An hour of learning. A resolve to observe a commandment long neglected.

Not necessarily a revolution of the soul, just a movement, a little movement. A turn-about. Shuva elay, vaashuva aleychem. Just begin to return to Me, and I shall return all the way to you.... Just a step towards God, and He will reach out to you. Appear before Him sincerely; not empty handed, but bearing gifts of the heart, and all the blessings shall be yours!

We shall not leave this synagogue today, empty-handed. For we are about to say Yizkor, and from the souls of our dear holy ancestors we shall take strength and courage and inspiration. Let them teach us how to appear before the Lord!

For they knew how to appear before God. Their giving knew no bounds, even when they had hardly anything to give. And they knew, especially, that they were closest to the Almighty when they were at one with our fellow congregants, our people, our fellow human beings, His creatures.

There is a passage in the portion of Reeh, part of which we read today, which teaches this lesson about appearing before God. “And it shall come to pass, when the way back will be long, and the place the Lord chose will be far away from you, since the Lord has blessed you abundantly....” Why is the thought repeated? If the way is long, then the place is far? It means, if the act of hesed is burdensome, problematic, if the gift is hard to give, it is not because it is difficult to make the gift, it is because the place of God’s abode has grown far away from you. Our parents were close to God - how? By being close to His children. When the widow the orphan the deprived the unfortunate cries out to Me, said the Lord, I shall heed because I am compassionate, and if we seek to be close to Him, we must be compassionate too.

God has blessed us with much. What do we give in return?

Here, now, is the Yizkor when we can indeed demonstrate that we are worthy of God’s blessing. Let us give as our heart moves us, and God shall bless us as we shall deserve.