

# A VIDUY FOR OUR TIMES

By Rabbi Yosef Bittón, 5779

One of the most important Mitsvot we have in Yom Kippur is the recitation of the Viduy. Viduy literally means "confession", and it is the central step of Teshuba, "repentance". The process of Teshuba, indeed, consists of three steps: 1. Admission of our faults (hakarot ha'et); 2. Verbal confession (Viduy); and 3. The resolution to abandon our bad actions and habits ('azibat ha'et). According to Maimonides the Mitsva of Teshuba is fulfilled when we recite the Viduy. The Viduy records a long list of transgressions and flaws. Reading the Viduy helps us in identifying wrongdoings that we might have done and forgotten or that we might have unconsciously suppressed from our memory. The most famous version of this confession prayer is the Viduy HaGadol (extended confession) written by Rabbenu Nissim Rosh Yeshivat Babel. The Sephardic custom is to say this Viduy during Yom Kippur ('arbit and/or shaharit, lo ta'ase; musaf , 'ase)

We should not read the Viduy mentally. Rather we must articulate every word, whispering to ourselves the list of transgressions mentioned in the text. Why? Because the Viduy is the culmination of the mental process of taking charge of our actions. Same as the concept of catharsis, similar to the 12 steps programs, only when we are capable of verbally articulating our problems or admitting our vices, we have finally accepted them, and only then we are able to change. Once we confess, we are confident that HaShem accepts our apologies, forgives us and helps us to improve.

We say the Viduy in plural, mentioning transgressions that we clearly know we have not committed. This teaches us that our moral responsibilities go beyond our personal accountability. In other words, when we see a friend, a family member, or anyone else over whom we have influence acting wrongly we should privately and politely rebuke him or her. And if we don't, it is considered as if we share some responsibility for their wrongdoings. Because we Jews believe in collective responsibility.

The Viduy is written in Hebrew. Now, if we read the Hebrew version of the Viduy and we don't understand what we are saying, then how are admission, regret and contrition, all these critical steps for Teshuba, going to happen? That is why, unlike other prayers, it is imperative to understand the words of the Viduy. Therefore, it is not only permitted but necessary to read the Viduy in a language that one understands.

The Viduy I'm presenting here is based on the short Viduy used in the Sephardic Selihot. My translation is a non-literal and expanded rendition of the Viduy, adapting its language and ideas to the mindset of the contemporary reader.

I recommend to read this text on Yom Kippur not instead but alongside the other confession prayers. With the hope that it will help us understand the main ideas of the Viduy, and inspire us to repent and obtain His forgiveness.

# TEXT OF THE VIDUY IN ENGLISH

## **HATATI HODI'AKHA**

*"I make my transgression known to You, HaShem. And I do not deny my sins. For I say: it is appropriate that I confess my sins to HaShem, and You will forgive my transgression."*

## **ANA HASHEM ELOKENU**

Please Oh, HaShem our God and the God of our Fathers, let our prayer come before You, and do not hide Yourself, our King, from our supplication, for we are not so insolent, nor so obstinate, as to say before You, HaShem, our God, God of our forefathers, that "we are righteous and we have never transgressed". Rather, we admit that we have transgressed, committed iniquity, and sinned; we, as well as our fathers and our family members:

**ASHAMNU:** We have sinned knowingly, fully aware that we were doing something wrong.

**AKHALNU MA-AKHALOT ASUROT:** We have eaten forbidden foods.

**BAGADNU:** We have betrayed our covenant with You. You trusted us with Your Tora and we have not honored our promise to keep Your Tora, study it and fully observe it.

**BITALNU TALMUD TORATEKHA:** We have wasted our free time in vanities, frivolities and nonsense, instead of studying the words of Your Tora, which bring us closer to You.

**GAZALNU:** We have robbed. We have taken, kept, used or spent what does not belong to us.

**GANAVNU:** We have stolen valuables and material goods. We have stolen time from our employers. We have stolen from many people in many different ways.

**GA-INU:** We have been arrogant. We have acted disrespectfully with our friends, family members and colleagues.

**DIBARNU DOFI VELESHON HARA':** We have spoken gossip, and we have said negative things -Leshon haRa- about other people. We have spread rumors about others. Rumors that, if they were said about us, would surely have made us feel embarrassed and hurt.

**DIBARNU EHAD BAPE VE-EHAD BALEB:** We acted cynically. We were hypocrites. We have spoken one thing with our mouth, while feeling (or intending) another thing in our hearts.

**HE'EVINU:** We have acted with corruption, injustice and iniquity.

**HIRHARNU HIRHURIM RA'IM BAYOM...:** We directed our minds to promiscuous thoughts during the day, and consequently brought upon ourselves impurity at night.

**VEHIRSHA'NU:** We have behaved wrongly, and we have caused others to imitate our bad behavior.

**VI'ADNU 'ATSMENU LIDBAR 'ABERA:** We have gathered with friends and acquaintances for sinful purposes. We attended inappropriate places or indecent gatherings.

**ZADNU:** We have sinned deliberately, with premeditation.

**ZANINU AHAR LIBENU...:** We let ourselves follow our hearts and our eyes seeking forbidden behavior.

**HAMASNU:** We have extorted and exploited other people. We took things that do not belong to us.

**HAMADNU:** We have been jealous and envious of others. We focused on what others have instead of being happy, satisfied and grateful with the blessings that You, HaShem, granted us.

**TAFALNU SHEQER UMIRMA:** We made up lies and deceitful stories, to conceal our own lies and our iniquity. We deceived our friends and our customers, to make money dishonestly.

**YA'ATSNU 'ETSOT RA'OT:** We have given countless times bad advice to friends and strangers, advising them to do what was good for us, rather than what was good for them. We betrayed the trust of those who needed our advice, giving biased guidance, prioritizing our personal gain and interest over our integrity.

**KIZABNU:** We have lied to friends and family members.

**KA'ASNU:** We overreacted. We lost our tempers—a sin which the Rabbis compared with idol worshiping because of its irrationality and destructiveness. We lost our patience with our students, and our children and spouses and got angry at them unfairly.

**LATSNU:** We have acted frivolously—doing wrong things that later we came to regret. We have lost consciousness of our mortality, of the nature of time and the shortness of our life. We wasted precious time in foolishness. “Time” that we will never be able to recover back.

**LOTSATSNU:** We have mocked and ridiculed others. We have bullied others. We have embarrassed friends and relatives in public. We have called other people with embarrassing nicknames.

**MARADNU:** We have acted rebelliously toward You. We knew what was the right thing to do in Your eyes, and yet we acted differently, out of arrogance and vanity.

**MARINU DEBAREKHA:** We have disobeyed Your words. We did not care to study, learn and understand what You commanded us.

**NI'ATSNU:** We have infuriated You, by repeatedly and deliberately committing the very same transgressions which we had come to regret in the past, and for which we had asked forgiveness from You in the past.

**NI-AFNU:** We have been unfaithful to our spouses. We have acted inappropriately with the spouses of our friends and colleagues.

**NISHBA'NU LASHAV VELASHEQER:** We have sworn in vain and falsely.

**NADARNU VELO SHILAMNU:** We have promised, but we we have failed to fulfill our promises. We have not kept our word. We have pledged money to charity and Tsedaqa, and have not kept our commitments.

**SARARNU:** We have been deviant. We have abandoned the path of righteousness.

**SORERIM UMORIM HAYNU:** We have been disrespectful and rebellious to elders, to Tora scholars and to our teachers.

**'AVINU:** We have committed injustice. We have been insensitive to the suffering of others. To the needs of the poor. To the sentiments of the orphans. To the feelings of the widow.

**'ABARNU AL MITSVOT 'ASE...:** We have failed in performing Your commandments. We have transgressed Your prohibitions. We have violated commandments which deserve the highest Divine punishment (Karet).

**'ABARNU AL HILUL HASHEM:** We have desecrated Your Name. We took advantage of our religious reputation to gain the trust of that people that we later deceived. Our wrongful behavior, our misdeeds and dishonesty, have caused others --Jews and gentiles-- to think or talk negatively about YOU!... and to feel resentment toward Your People and Your Law, the Tora.

**PASHA'NU:** We have sinned willfully, defying openly and without shame Your words, Your commandments and Your will.

**PAGAMNU BE-OT BERIT QODESH:** We have desecrated the sign of our pact, the Berit Mila, by committing sexual offenses and engaging in promiscuous behavior.

**TSARARNU:** We have oppressed other human beings, Jews and gentiles. We have mistreated and abused our employees, our maids, and those who work with us or for us. We have humiliated and hurt those who deserve our patience, our respect and kindness.

**TSI'ARNU AB VA-EM:** We have caused suffering to our parents by disobeying them, by being disrespectful to them, by not honoring them and by not taking good care of them as we should, ignoring the Fifth of the Ten Commandments.

**QISHINU 'OREF:** We have been stubborn, narrow minded and obstinate. We did not change our minds or opinions, even when we knew that we were wrong. We acted arrogantly by not asking forgiveness from our friends and relatives when we offended them. We did not listen to the reason and common sense. We did not reconsider our wrong opinions and values.

**QILQALNU TSINOROT HASHEFA':** We have denied from ourselves receiving all Your blessings. We rejected the means and destroyed the channels of blessing by which You bestow upon us Your abundance. We have chosen to take for granted everything You granted us.

**RASHA'NU:** We have been wicked. Through our wickedness, we have hurt and caused pain to our friends, children, family members and loved ones.

**RA'IM LASHAMAYIM...:** We have acted wickedly against You and against our peers. We acted according to our limited judgment, ignoring Your infinite Judgment, expressed in Your Tora.

**SHIHATNU:** We have corrupted ourselves. We have learned how to deceive and perfected the art of lying. And at the end, deception became part of our personalities.

**SHIQARNU:** We have spoken falsely and deceitfully.

**SHIHATNU ZERA QODESH...:** We have wasted our holy seed. We did not keep our eyes clean and pure. We have looked deliberately at inappropriate images, causing the seeds of life to be wasted.

**TI'AVNU:** We have committed abominations. We have performed the actions that You abhor and which You taught us to reject: injustice, oppression, deception.

**TA'INU VETI'ATA'NU:** We have taken the wrong paths. We have caused other people to join us in our wrong ways. We have pushed others to commit the same sins we have committed, to make us feel less uncomfortable and less lonely in our depravity. We have given the wrong example to our sons and daughters, who naturally observe us, learn from us and imitate what we do. We have failed to teaching our children—the souls that You have entrusted in our hands—to follow Your paths and avoid that which is wrong in Your eyes.

**VESARNU...:** We have turned away from Your commandments and from Your Laws. And at the end, we came to realize that our rebelliousness has not served us any good... You are Just and Righteous in Your judgment and in Your verdict. And we admit that whatever misfortune is befalling us, it is the fruit of our own doing. You have taught us to seek righteousness, but we ignore You, and we brought wickedness upon ourselves.