

Parshas Ki Savo

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1. Appreciating the Gifts with Which One is Endowed

The Torah states that when one brings the newly ripened fruits, *bikkurim*, to the Temple mount one must make a declaration of appreciation as prescribed by the Torah. He recounts certain events which transpired as far back as Yaakov (our Patriarch) being saved from the hands of his evil father-in-law, Lavan. After the declaration is made and the individual prostrates himself before G-d, the Torah then states, “You shall be glad with all the goodness that Hashem, your G-d, has given you and your household...” Seemingly the joy and recognition of all the good that Hashem had bestowed on the individual is only realized after the individual prostrates himself before G-d. Why is this so? Why is the declaration, which identifies all that G-d had done for us, not sufficient to bring about that joy?

It is important to note that when the Torah uses the term “*v’hishtachvesah* – and you shall bow” it does not simply mean bowing at the waist but rather it is full prostration – face down on the ground. This gesture signifies total subservience. It is one’s negation of himself before G-d. It is an indication that one is no different than the dust of the earth. The Torah is telling us that it is only after one negates himself to this degree that he is able to truly appreciate – to rejoice in the good- that Hashem has given him. When one is negated and humbled to this degree he understands that he has no deservingness and is only a beneficiary of Hashem’s kindness. This is the reason the declaration of the *bikkurim* must be followed with prostration.

Pirkei Avos (Ethics of Our Fathers) states, “...Your house should be a meeting place for *chachamim* (rabbis). You should roll in the dust of their feet and you shall drink thirstily of their words.” The Mishna is relating to us the progression of one’s involvement with Torah Scholars. If one’s home, the location with which one identifies, becomes a meeting place for Torah Scholars, it indicates that what they represent is central to that individual’s life. However this alone is not sufficient to cause one to fully appreciate the teachings and counsel of the rabbis. The Mishna then states, “You should roll in the dust of their feet...” Meaning one must negate himself to these special individuals (which is symbolized by rolling in the dust of their feet). One is even agreeable to demean himself on their behalf. It is only then that one “will drink thirstily of their words...” Only then (after one’s personal negation) will a person have a full appreciation for their teachings and wisdom.

If one does not follow the prescription of the Mishna, at best, he will be the type of individual who continuously passes judgment on the words of the rabbis – deciding whether they are cogent and acceptable or unacceptable. It is clear that one’s ego acts as an obstruction to the words of the rabbis. Therefore it is only after it is removed through negation that one could fully benefit and rejoice with the Torah.

2. Understanding the Message of Bikkurim

The Torah states, “**It will be when you enter the Land that Hashem, your G-d, gives you...You shall take the first fruit (*bikkurim*) of the ground that you bring in from your Land that Hashem, your G-d, gives you, and you shall put it in a basket**

and go to the place that Hashem, your G-d, will choose to make His Name rest there.” Ohr HaChaim HaKadosh explains that this verse can be interpreted on an illusionary (*remez*) level. He explains that when the Torah states “It will be when you enter the Land...” it is referring to one’s entrance into the world to come “the elevated land/location.” Ohr HaChaim explains at the beginning of the Portion of Eikev that whenever the Torah uses the term “and it will be (*v’haya*)” it is an expression of joy. In the context of *bikkurim* it could be explained: “It will truly be joyous when one ascends to the world to come with the fruits of his labor, which are his Torah study and his mitzvos.” The Torah uses the term “*teneh* - basket” for the vessel that is used to bring one’s fruit. He explains that numerical value of the word “*teneh (basket)*” is 60, which corresponds to 60 tractates of the Talmud. It is when one ascends and comes before Hashem with his Talmud and mitzvos in hand (which are one’s spiritual accomplishments) that one will be in a joyous state.

Ohr HaChaim HaKadosh points out that there is no one who is perfect and without sin. He cites the Gemara in Tractate *Erchin* which states that even the holy Patriarchs (Avraham, Yitzchak, and Yaakov) are not perfect enough to stand in judgment before Hashem. If this is the case then how will the average Jew, despite his accomplishments, fare in the presence of Hashem’s Judgment? The Torah advises us how to respond. One must say, “**An Aramean tried to destroy my (fore) father... (as one recites in the *bikkurim* ritual).**” He explains that the “Aramean” is referring to the *yetzer haRa* (evil inclination) that attempts to destroy one’s spirituality, which is one’s soul (*avi-* my father).

When the verse states, “**It will be when you enter the Land that Hashem, your G-d, gives you...**” it appears that one’s share in the world to come is only given by Hashem as a “gift” rather than something that is earned. However, we know that one’s portion in the world to come is determined by what one earned through his good deeds during his lifetime – how do we understand this? Ohr HaKadosh HaChaim explains that the portion/reward that one receives in the world to come is exponentially greater than the amount of effort that one invests in his lifetime to perform mitzvos. Thus, relatively speaking, since the reward in the world to come is so much greater than one’s efforts, the reward is the equivalent of a gift from G-d. This is a lesson on how one must perceive his investment of initiative in life vis-à-vis its return.

It is interesting to note that the obligation of tithing of the dough (*challah*), grains and produce (*Terumah*), and other tithes, were implemented immediately upon entry into the Land. However, the mitzvah of *bikkurim* (*first fruits*) only became an obligation after the Land was conquered and divided – when the Jewish people were “settled in the Land.” If one is obligated to express his appreciation for all that G-d has done for him through the bringing of the *bikkurim*, then why is this expression of gratitude delayed until the Jewish people were “settled in the Land”?

In order for a person to be able to focus on and internalize the value of being a beneficiary of G-d’s Goodness, one needs a setting without distractions. When personally settled, he is able to have the clarity of mind to internalize that Hashem is the source of all blessing. Therefore the Torah only obligated the Jewish people to bring *bikkurim* after they were “settled in the Land” because it was only then that they were able to focus.

The Gemara in Tractate *Avodah Zorah* tells us, “The one who toils before the Shabbos will eat on the Shabbos.” Meaning, if one toils with mitzvos and develops his spirituality through Torah study, he will reap its reward in the world to come. This existence is only a means to a greater end, which is the world to come. If one takes the

time to reflect and internalize this fact, he will understand the importance of putting “fruits into his basket” through Torah study, the support of Torah and observance of mitzvos.

3. The Ability to Appreciate

The Torah tells us that in the fourth year of the Sabbatical Cycle, before the Passover Festival, one must make the confession of the Tithes. The Torah states, **“You shall say before Hashem, your G-d, “I have removed the holy things from the house, and I have also given to the Levite, to the proselyte, to the orphan, and to the widow, according to whatever commandment You commanded me; I have not transgressed any of Your commandments...Gaze down from your holy abode, from heaven, and bless Your people Israel, and the ground that You gave us, as You swore to our forefathers, a Land flowing with milk and honey.”** Rashi cites Chazal who explain this passage to mean: “We have done what You have decreed upon us (given all the tithes) and now it is time for You (Hashem) to respond with Your part of the agreement. You had said, “If you follow My Statutes I will give rain in its proper time...” Meaning if the Jewish people are meticulous in taking tithes and distributing them accordingly, they would be rewarded with bounty.

Rashi at the beginning of the Portion of Bechukosai explains the verse, “If you follow in My Statutes... (You will receive much blessing)...” is referring to one’s level of dedication to Torah study. If one toils in the study of Torah, he will merit all blessing. Seemingly the two interpretations of Rashi are contradictory. Rashi in the Portion of Ki Savo Rashi explains that the prerequisite to be worthy of blessing is when one tithes properly and distributes the various tithes to the proper parties. However in the Portion of Bechukosai, Rashi states that the prerequisite for blessing is determined by the degree of one’s dedication to Torah study. How do we reconcile the two explanations offered by Rashi?

Rambam in the Laws of Tefillah states that tefillah (prayer) is a Torah obligation which is comprised of three parts. In the introductory blessings of the Amidah (silent prayer) one is obliged to acknowledge and articulate Hashem in all facets of His being. The second segment of the Amidah is comprised of the blessings of requests. The third and final segment is the blessings of thanks. Rambam states that only if one articulates all three segments (including the second which is the requests) does one fulfill his obligation of tefillah. However if one had only articulated the opening and closing segments of tefillah – omitting the blessings of request – one does not fulfill his obligation of tefillah.

Seemingly, if blessings of request are omitted, one should still be able to fulfill the obligation of tefillah because the obligation to pray is based on the verse in the Shema “You should serve your G-d with all your hearts.” The Talmud tells us that the “service of the heart” is tefillah. Acknowledgement of who Hashem is – such as the Great,

Powerful, Awesome, Heals the sick, Raises the dead, etc. should be sufficient to fulfill one's obligation of "service of the heart." Why is it that if one does not stand before Hashem and beseech Him for personal needs the obligation of tefillah is not fulfilled?

If one truly believes that G-d is the All-Powerful, Awesome, etc. who gives life and provides for every aspect of existence, how is it possible, if one truly believes this, that he should not ask the Omnipotent Benefactor for all his needs? Not making requests to G-d is only a confirmation that the initial articulation was only "lip service" without any sincere belief. Thus, if one omits the segment of requests, he does not fulfill his obligation of "service of the heart."

How is it possible to be so responsible and meticulous regarding the tithing of the many species of produce without the proper knowledge? It is something which is an impossibility. To relinquish the percentages that are required by the Torah to fulfill one's obligation of doing a proper tithing can only come about when one truly appreciates and internalizes his spirituality. This sense is only experienced by the individual who toils in his study of Torah. Thus we say to Hashem, "We have done what You have commanded us, which is only because we appreciate and understand our responsibility through the study of Torah. Allow Your blessing to come upon us."

The Gemara states in *Tractate Beitzah*, "One's yearly stipend is allocated by G-d from Rosh HaShana to the next." If one truly lives this belief as a reality, then one would not consider compromising on his mitzvah observance or Torah study for the sake of his livelihood. However this sense of reality can only come about through dedicated Torah study.

4. Torah the Key to the Heart

The Torah states, "**Moshe and the Kohanim, the Levites, spoke to all Israel saying: *Hascase u shma* (Be attentive and hear), O Israel...**" The Midrash Tanchumah asks, "What is the meaning of "*Hascase u shma* (Be attentive and hear)"? The Midrash answers, "*Has* means that one should remain silent and then afterwards *cataise*. What is the meaning of *cataise*? Moshe said to the Jewish people, "Divide yourselves into groups (*keetos keetos*) and be attentive to the words of Torah." Another interpretation given by the Midrash is, "Moshe said to the Jewish people "*Kasisu l'vavchem v'nafshechem* – Smatter/break your hearts and your physicality for the sake of Torah."

We can understand the breaking of one's physicality for the sake of Torah as the Mishna in Pirkei Avos explains. The Mishna states, "Bread and salt you shall eat. Water in small measure you shall drink. On the ground you shall sleep. And a life of pain

(deprivation) you shall live.” This is stated as the prerequisite for one to acquire *Kesser Torah* (the Crown of Torah). What is the meaning of the smattering/breaking of one’s heart for the sake of Torah?

We say every day in our prayers (*u’val l’tzion*), “Open our hearts with Your Torah...” The key to opening the capacity and appreciation of the Jewish heart to spirituality is only through Torah study. If the heart is sealed there is no receptivity for spirituality. The heart needs to be penetrated. As the Torah tells us, at the end of time G-d will circumcise the heart of every Jew. Meaning, Hashem will remove the blockage which prevents the heart from absorbing spirituality. Since the time has not yet come for the spiritual circumcision of the heart, we pray to Hashem that He opens our hearts through our Torah study. In the blessing preceding the Shema we ask Hashem to, “Enlighten our eyes with Your Torah...” Why if one’s heart is penetrated is this not sufficient for one to have relevance to spirituality? Why in addition must his eyes be illuminated with Torah?

The heart is the organ that contains the capacity for desire and lust. It is only a question of to what the heart is attuned. It could be something of a material nature or one which is spiritual. We say in the *zemiros* (songs) on Shabbos, “This is what our heart lusts and desires...” This is referring to something within the context of *kiddusha* (*holiness*). The Gemara tells us that the heart “lusts” and the eyes are the brokers for the heart. Just as a broker assists the client to locate what he wishes so too the eyes identify and locate what the heart desires. As we find, some individuals take notice of certain things which may be of a spiritual nature while others take notice of more material objects. This is only an indication of what their hearts desire.

We pray that our hearts should be “opened” with the Torah so that it will be attuned to desire *kiddusha* (*holiness*). As with any desire, once the heart desires *kiddusha* it will not be sated regardless of how much it has. The Gemara in Tractate Taanis tells us that Torah is compared to water. Additionally, the Gemara in Tractate Avodah Zorah tells us that the Jewish people are compared to fish. Just as the fish, although their existence is completely immersed in water, they extend their mouths outside of the water when it is raining to catch the raindrops. So too, although the Jewish people are immersed in Torah study, they will not be sated regardless of how much they have. This is because the heart of the Jew is attuned to spirituality.

In addition to opening one’s heart, his eyes must be refined to sense spirituality. The eye is naturally accustomed to only seeking out objects of a material nature. However, we pray that Hashem should enlighten our eyes with His Torah so that they will be proper brokers of the spiritual heart. Thus the Torah not only opens the heart but it also spiritualizes the eyes. This is the meaning of the words of the Midrash, “Smatter/break your hearts and your physicality for the sake of Torah.” Meaning, the heart is penetrated and opened with the study of Torah. It is only when one has humility that he applies himself to the degree that the Torah will penetrate his heart and thus bring about spiritualization.

5. *Every Day A New Horizon*

The Torah states that when one brings the *bikkurim*, the new fruits and grains, to the Temple mount he must make a declaration of appreciation before Hashem. He must say, **“I declare (*hegaditee*) today to Hashem, your G-d, that I have come to the Land that Hashem swore to our forefathers...”** The declaration, “I declare today...that I have come to the Land...” was made not only during the first year that the *bikkurim* were brought (which was 15 years after entering the Land) but it was continuously declared for hundreds of years as part of the *bikkurim* ritual. Despite the fact this declaration was made for any years and was repeated whenever the *bikkurim* were brought, nevertheless it was stated, **“I declare (*hegaditee*) today to Hashem, your G-d, that I have come to the Land...”** How do we understand this? Secondly, why does the individual begin the declaration with “*hegaditee*” (I declare) rather than “*amartee*” (I say) or “*seepartee*” (I tell)?

The psalm of *Ashrei*, is an acrostic of the Hebrew Alphabet. In passage corresponding to the letter “*daled*” it reads, “Each generation will praise Your deeds and of Your mighty deeds they will declare (*yageedu*).” Malbim in his commentary on Tehillim explains, “The term “*yageedu*” is an expression of *haggadah* (*declaration*) that relates to something of value of which one is not aware.” The term “*haggadah*” is an expression of value and appreciation for something that was unknown – such as the “mighty deeds” of Hashem. One may witness and appreciate the “mighty deeds” of Hashem; however, since they are so great and unfathomable there is always an element of the unknown.

The Torah tells us that there is a Positive Commandment to communicate to your child about the bondage and redemption from Egypt. As it is stated, “*V’Hegadditah l’vinchah* – You must declare to your children...” The Torah could have used the term, “You must **tell** (*seeparta*) your children the events of the exodus.” Nevertheless, the Torah uses the term of “*haggadah*” (*declare*) to inform us that regardless of how many times one had related the story of bondage and redemption/ exodus, it must be communicated as if it were the first time it was told. We read in the Haggadah that Rabbi Akiva and his colleagues were so engrossed in relating the story of Egypt that they had to be reminded by his students that the time had come to recite the “Shema of the morning.” Because they were reliving and re-enacting what had transpired in Egypt, it was communicated as if it were the first time they come upon those observations and understandings. This is the mitzvah of “*V’Hegadditah l’vinchah*.”

Regarding the “mighty deeds” of Hashem, we speak about the wonders of existence in a similar vein despite the fact that we have been continuously exposed and are aware of His ability. Every time we refer to the “mighty deeds” of Hashem we must speak of them as if they were a first-time observation because there is always and aspect

to them that was not noticed before.

The declaration of *bikkurim* is an expression of to G-d for all that He has done for us. When one receives something of special value for the first time, one feels great appreciation. However after continuously receiving the same bounty from G-d one can lose that sense of appreciation because one no longer sees it as being special. Thus, it becomes something ordinary and even expected. Therefore, the text of the declaration of *bikkurim* is “**I declare (*hegaditee*) today...**” Meaning, one’s appreciation is declared every year at the time of the bringing of the new fruits to express one’s appreciation to Hashem as if it was something special that was received for the first time. The only way one can maintain a continuous sense of appreciation is to perceive what he receives as something that is unexpected. Thus, it retains its special status.

When we begin the Amidah (silent prayer) we predicate it on a verse from Tehillim (Psalms), “Hashem, open my lips and allow my mouth to declare (*yagid*) Your praises.” There are two difficulties regarding this request of Dovid HaMelech. Firstly, why does G-d need to give us the ability to speak if it is already a natural ability of every human being? Secondly, why did Dovid ask Hashem to give him the ability to “declare (*yagid*)” the praises of Hashem and not “tell” or “say” them? Dovid’s request to Hashem was not to give him the ability to speak; but rather, to give him the ability to recognize the Omnipotence of Hashem so that he could declare “*yagid*” His specialness – which are His praises.

We say in the Psalm of the Shabbos, “To declare (*l’hagid*) Your kindness in the morning and Your belief at night.” Dovid again uses the term “declare.” Every morning when Dovid looked at existence he was overwhelmed with the specialness of Hashem. Thus, “declaring” His *chesed* (kindness).

Maharal of Prague in the introduction to *Gevuras Hashem* explains why he chose to name his work relating to the exodus from Egypt – “*Gevuras Hashem*.” He says that it is based on a verse from Tehillim (Psalms), “Who could utter the power of Hashem, to be able to make tell over all of His praise...” Dovid could have simply stated “Who could utter the power of Hashem”? Why does he have to conclude -“to be able to tell over all of His praise”? The world is so vast and broad that it is not possible for any human being to be aware of all of the doings of Hashem. One cannot know every aspect of existence. Even regarding that of which we are aware, it is not possible to understand the depth of what it is. Thus, Dovid concludes, “to be able to tell over all of His praise “ to indicate that even what we seem to understand – we truly do not fully grasp.

Life is a continuum of new horizons. Dovid HaMelech experienced every moment of life as if it were a new experience. Thus he wrote in Psalms, “Who could utter the power of Hashem, to be able to tell over all of His praise...” Similarly, the study of Torah is a continuum of new understanding and appreciation, which brings one to another level

of perceiving Hashem in existence. Despite the fact that one may study the same Torah subject many times, he must approach it as if it were the first time because there are always new insights and ways to appreciate the same subject matter. A Jew can only maintain his enthusiasm and be motivated in his Judaism if his experience remains invigorating and new.

6. How Vulnerable is a Human Being? (From Ki Seitzei)

The Torah states, **“When a camp goes out against your enemies, you shall guard against anything evil.”** When one is in the midst of battle, he must be careful to safeguard himself against sin. Rashi cites the Jerusalem Talmud which explains that the reason one must be especially careful regarding his spirituality is because amid danger satan is able to prosecute a person to a greater degree. Under normal circumstances, the attribute of Mercy does not allow satan to prosecute. However in situations where when one needs an extraordinary level of merit (such as times of danger) his worthiness comes under scrutiny.

Ramban explains the necessity of being more spiritually vigilant during times of battle is unrelated to maintaining one’s worthiness in battle. He explains that the reason one must especially control behavior during these times is because he is more susceptible to human foible. Ramban says, “One who is naturally compassionate and kind becomes cruel in times of battle. As it is known how soldiers behave in battle... They consume things which are abominable, steal, plunder, and rape without any conscience. Therefore the Torah warns the individual who is going to battle to be careful not to fall to that level.” The Sifri writes that in battle one is even susceptible to adultery, idolatry, and *lashon hara* (evil speech). Why does one succumb to such depraved manner in times of battle?

The question becomes even more difficult because the Torah tells us that tzaddikim (devoutly righteous) were the only individuals who were eligible to go to battle. As it is stated in the Portion of Shoftim, “Who is the man who is fearful and fainthearted (from his sins) - let him go and return to his house.” Before going to the battlefield, the Kohen Gadol (High Priest who was specifically anointed for this purpose) would address the soldiers and state the criteria which would qualify those who were eligible for military service. The Torah nevertheless tells us that despite this individual’s spiritual status, if he were to be attracted to a woman who is not Jewish (or even married) in the midst of battle, he is permitted to cohabit with her. The Gemara in Tractate Kiddushin tells that the reason the Torah permits the non-Jewish woman to be taken in battle (even for the purpose of marriage) is because the one who desires this woman would transgress the law even if it were not permissible. Therefore it is better that he take her in an allowable rather than forbidden state. It is important to note once again that the Torah is addressing people who are tzaddikim - not the average person. Why would the tzaddik, whose standards and ideals of life are so foreign to this type of behavior, succumb to sin?

The Mishna in Pirkei Avos (*Ethics of our Fathers*) states, “One must pray for the welfare of government because if it were not for the fear of government, people would swallow one another alive.” If there is no law and order even the most ethical, moral, and civilized individual would become a predator. Why is this so? A human being can justify almost anything depending on his circumstances. If a state of anarchy exists then a human being enters into the mode of human survival – “survival of the fittest.” It is either kill or

be killed. Therefore, one could even justify killing another in the most barbaric manner for the sake of survival. At that moment one is consumed and focused on surviving. Similarly, when one enters into battle he operates in a continuous state of life or death –his mindset is only to survive. Thus, the Torah must even forewarn the tzaddik to be vigilant and in control of himself against anything that is inappropriate (or even evil) because he is vulnerable to such behavior.

In a state of anarchy or at a time of war (when there is no law and order) – how is one to protect himself from sinning? How is one to maintain a rational view of reality and not succumb to the lowest instinct of the human being, which is the animal? The Mishna is Pirkei Avos informs us of the prerequisite for one to behave as a proper human being – which is to understand that there are consequences to his behavior and that under law one is held accountable for that behavior.

Also, if one has sufficient fear of G-d he will hold his negative inclination at bay even if there is no law and order. If one has a fear of G-d, there is never a moment when one does not sense and realize the consequences of his actions. There is a continuous awareness of culpability. Thus one must pray for assistance in the area of *yiras shamayim (fear of heaven)* just as one should pray for the welfare of government. If a person comprehends and understands that one's existence and personal situation is only because G-d deems it to be so, there will be no moment when he could justify any behavior which does not conform to Torah law.