

Parshas Ki Savo

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1. The Secret to Spiritual Success

The Torah states, **“Moshe said to the Jewish people, “It shall be that if you hearken to the voice of Hashem, your G’d, to observe, to perform all of His commandments that I command you this day, then Hashem your G’d will make you supreme over all the nations of the earth. All these blessings will come upon you...Blessed shall you be when you come in and blessed shall you be when you go out.”** Rashi cites Chazal who explain that “Blessed shall you be when you come...” is referring to one’s coming into the world and departing is when one passes away. Rashi cites the Gemara, “(The ultimate blessing is) You should leave this world without sin as you entered into this world.” Meaning, one should be blessed to pass away free of sin and with spiritual accomplishments. The human being is inclined to sin, pursue the material, and not the path of spiritual advancement. Since this is the reality of the human condition, how is one to merit the blessing of **“Blessed shall you be when you come in and blessed shall you be when you go out”?**

Ohr HaChaim HaKadosh explains, “The only way one can leave this world without sin is to be engaged in Torah study because it is the Torah itself that protects one from sin. As the verse states, ‘Hashem will cause your enemies to fall before you...When you begin singing the song (of Torah)...the Amonites and Mt. Seir (Edomites) will be smitten’ Our Rabbis teach us that the ‘song’ is referring to the study of Torah.”

The Torah tells us that Yitzchak our Patriarch had said to Yaakov– “The voice is the voice of Yaakov and the hands are the hands of Esav.” The Midrash explains this to mean that as long as the voice is that of Yaakov, which is as long as there are the ‘chirpings’ of the children studying Torah in the synagogues and the adults in the study halls, the hands will not be that of Esav. As long as the Jewish people (and their children) are engaged in Torah study, the power of Esav (Edomites) is held at bay and is incapacitated. However, if the voice of Yaakov is silent then Esav will have the upper hand.

Rambam writes in Hilchos Talmid Torah (Laws of Talmid Torah), “Although there is a mitzvah to study Torah during the day and nighttime period, the majority of one’s study should be done in the nighttime period...Our Rabbis have said, “The song of Torah is only in the night. As the verse in Jeremiah states, ‘Rise and sing out in the night.’” Thus, the song of the Jew is Torah – which is most effective when studied during the nighttime period. Without the study of Torah the Jew cannot survive spiritually.

Reb Moshe Chaim Luzzato z’tl (RaMChaL) writes in his work Path of the Just that as much as one may think that he can take control of his evil inclination through his own efforts and abilities, he is mistaken. The Gemara teaches us, “I created the evil inclination and I created the Torah as its antidote.” One cannot subdue and incapacitate the evil inclination without Torah study. Reb Moshe Chaim Luzzato explains that in medieval times princes would play a game of going into a maze composed of high hedges. All of the avenues of the maze were virtually

identical and if one did not have a discerning eye, he would be trapped in the maze. In such a situation, the only way one could actually extricate himself from the maze was if there were an individual standing on top of the hedges with a clear vision of the entire maze advising him of the proper path to take.

RaMChaL compares physical existence to the maze. One may believe that what he is doing is correct and even a good deed, when in fact it is not. One may think that he is doing a mitzvah because he 'feels' it to be right – but in reality he is transgressing. The one who stands on top of the hedges advising the Jew on how to embark and continue on the right path (which is the Torah) is the Torah Sage, who is proficient and experienced as an advisor and guide.

Rambam tells us in the *Laws of Deos* that just as one consults a physician concerning physical ailments one should consult the Rabbis when one is failing spiritually. When man fails spiritually, he is in need of spiritual rehabilitation. The Rabbis are the individuals who guide the Jew through the maze of life and instruct him how to subdue the evil inclination. The Rabbis teach us that the song of the Jew is Torah. The only way one can have clarity and thus succeed spiritually and merit the blessing of leaving this world as he entered is through the study of Torah.

2. The Proper Context for Blessing

The Torah states, **“Hashem will command the blessing for you in your storehouses (*asomecha*) and your every undertaking; and He will bless you in the Land that Hashem, your G'd, gives you. Hashem will confirm you for Himself as a holy people, as He swore to you- if you observe the commandments of Hashem, your G'd, and you go in His ways.”** G'd will bring forth blessing upon His people and establish them as “holy people” only when they live within the context of Torah and emulate His ways. The Gemara teaches us that the way one emulates the ways of G'd is to emulate His characteristics– “Just as He is, You shall be – Just as He is compassionate, you shall be compassionate. Just as He is gracious, you should be gracious...”

While the term “*asomecha*” literally means “storehouses” as the location of the grain/bounty, the Gemara in Tractate Taanis explains that the term is also alluding to the fact that blessing only exists within the context of “*samui min ha'ayin* – something that is concealed from the eye.” Blessing comes upon that which is concealed and cannot come upon something that has been quantified/known quantity. The Gemara states that blessing cannot come upon something that is measured, weighed, or counted. If one were to harvest his crops and pray to G'd that He should bring blessing upon his harvest, his tefillah is valid. However, if one were to weigh and measure/quantify his crop and then pray to G'd that He bring blessing upon his harvest, his tefillah is in vain – because blessing cannot come upon something that has been quantified. Blessing only has relevance to something that is unknown.

Mahral of Prague z'tl explains that the concept of blessing is of a spiritual nature. For example, if one were to say to his fellow, “You should be blessed.” The extent of that blessing is unlimited. The concept of “unlimited” is a spiritual concept because spirituality is unending. Thus,

blessing cannot exist within a quantified/ limited context which is the physical.

It is interesting to note that the Torah prohibits the counting/quantification of Jews. The Jewish people may be counted only under special circumstances and it is done through the Machtzis HaShekel (half silver coin). What is the reason for this? The Jewish people are a physical people whose essence is spiritual – physical existence is only their circumstance. If the Jew is quantified then it is an indication that his essence is physical and limited to his being. If the Jew is made physical through quantification, he has no relevance to blessing – and is thus vulnerable to all the pitfalls of humanity. Therefore the Jew resorts to quantification only when he believes that his security is rooted in the material.

The Torah tells us that the Jewish people are classified as a “holy people” and identify with spirituality when they adhere to the Torah. It is only within this context that the Jew understands and appreciates that his blessing comes only through G’d. This reality has no relevance to quantification because it is rooted in G’d – who is Infinite.

The Mishna in Pirkei Avos (Ethics of our Fathers) states that one should not underestimate the value of even a seemingly unimportant mitzvah. One cannot know the extent of its reward. The reward of mitzvos is not manifested in a physical/limited setting but rather in an unlimited spiritual context. Thus, even when the Torah reveals the reward for sending away the mother bird when taking her chicks/eggs is a “lengthening of days,” it is expressed as something that is unlimited. The Gemara in Tractate Kiddushin explains that “lengthening of days” refers to the world to come – which is spiritual. For example, an esrog is only the physical entity that facilitates the mitzvah. The reward/effect of the mitzvah of taking the esrog is unlimited and not relevant to the physicality of the esrog.

The Gemara in Tractate Bava Metzia tells us that if one is asked, “Is it true that you have studied so many tractates?” one is permitted to alter the truth of his response in order not reveal the extent of his Torah knowledge. The Commentators explain that it is because of modesty that one is permitted to answer in this manner. According to our understanding, Torah is something that is unlimited and not quantifiable. Therefore, one should not reveal the extent of his knowledge because he is applying limitation to it which is quantification, thus diminishing its spiritual value.

The Jewish people throughout history have always been small in number and the “minority” of humanity. The reason for this is that the physical quantification of the Jewish people has no relevance to their essence. The success of the Jew is unrelated to his numbers. The blessing of the Jew is rooted in the infinite - which is G’d Himself – and therefore should not be quantified.

3. Appreciating the Gifts with which one is Endowed

The Torah states that when one brings the newly ripened fruits, *Bikurim*, 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 spared from annihilation by the hands of his evil father-in-law, Lavan. After the declaration is made, 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 Torah is telling us the joy and recognition of all the good that G'd had bestowed on the individual is only realized after the individual prostrates himself before G'd. Why is the declaration, which identifies all that G'd had done for him, 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 G'd 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 G'd's kindness. This is the reason the declaration of the *Bikurim* 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 becomes a meeting place for Torah Scholars, it indicates that they represent what is central to that individual's life- because is the home is the location with which he identifies. 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 a barrier 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.

4. Understanding the Message of Bikurim

The Torah states, **“It will be when you enter the Land that Hashem, your G'd, gives you...You shall take the first fruit (*Bikurim*) 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 allusionary (*remez*) level. He explains that when the Torah states *“It will be when you enter the Land...”* 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 *Bikurim* 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 mitzvos.”* The Torah uses the term *“teneh* - basket” for the receptacle that is used to bring one's fruit. He explains that 60 is the numerical value of the word *“teneh*, which corresponds to

60 tractates of the Talmud. It is when one ascends and comes before G'd with the Talmud and mitzvos in hand (which are one's spiritual accomplishments) then 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 father... (as one recites in the *Bikurim* ritual).**" He explains that the "Aramean" is referring to the *yetzer haRa* (evil inclination) that attempts to destroy our spirituality, which is our soul (*avi*- my father)- which is the essence of the Jew.

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 G'd 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 and investment, 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 *Bikurim* (*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 *Bikurim*, 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 one is personally settled, he is able to have the clarity of mind to internalize that G'd is the source of all blessing. Therefore the Torah only obligated the Jewish people to bring *Bikurim* 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. The physical setting 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.

5. *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 (G’d) 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 G’d 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 G’d is – such as Great, Powerful, and 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 G’d 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 beseeching G’d for one’s needs 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 for one to be responsible and meticulous regarding the tithing of the many species of produce without the proper level of dedication? 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 G’d, “We have done what You have commanded us, which is only possible because we appreciate and understand our responsibility through toiling in 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 Rosh Hashana.” 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.

6. Torah: The Key to Opening 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 *catais*. What is the meaning of *catais*? 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 it is stated in the Mishna in Pirkei Avos, “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). However, what is the meaning of the smattering/breaking of one’s heart for the sake of Torah?

We beseech G’d every day in our prayers (*u’vah l’tzion*), “Open our hearts with Your Torah...” The key to open the Jewish heart to spirituality is only through Torah study. If the heart is sealed there is no receptivity or sensitivity 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, G'd 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 G'd that He opens our hearts through our Torah study. In the blessing preceding the Shema we ask G'd 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 we ask that our eyes be illuminated with Torah?

The heart is the organ that contains the capacity for desire and lust. It is only a question 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 of 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. We find that some individuals take notice of certain things which may be of a spiritual nature while others take notice of the material. This is a clear indication of what their hearts truly 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. Although the existence of the fish is completely in water, it extends its mouth outside of the water when it is raining to catch the additional rain droplets. 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, one's 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 G'd should enlighten our eyes with His Torah so that they will be proper brokers for 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 should be penetrated and opened with the study of Torah.