

# The Vindicating Power Of One's Physicality

## YadAvNow.com Weekly Video Series: Ki Savo

Rabbi Yosef Kalatsky

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1. An Ashkanazic custom is to say Psalm 27 twice daily in Elul through Shimini Atzeres.
2. King David: Throughout his lifetime he only had one yearning to dwell in the House of G-d all the days of his life.
3. Chofetz Chaim: Throughout all stages of his life, King David had only one yearning- to dwell in the House of G-d.
4. This yearning persisted throughout his lifetime- whether he was a shepherd, the son-in-law of the king who slew Goliath, a fugitive, or the greatest king ever to be.
5. When one has this single minded perspective, one blesses Hashem for the Good and the Bad.
6. Moshe says to the Jews: What is G-d asking of you?
7. Chofetz Chaim: Every moment we make continuous choices believing that the choice is appropriate.
8. One must ask himself, "Is this truly what G-d is asking of you?"
9. When confronted with this question, one has a greater chance of making the right choice.
10. A safety mechanism suggested by Chazal: Choose for yourself a teacher and acquire for yourself a friend.

## Weekly Torah Commentary Series: Ki Savo



### The Vindicating Power Of One's Physicality

#### **Suffering within the Context of Choice**

*Torah:* "If a bird's nests happens to be before you on the road... you shall surely send away the mother bird and take the young for yourself, so that it shall be good for you and will prolong your days."

*Midrash:* "...What is the reward for sending away the mother bird? One will have prolonged days... If for a *mitzvah* that has no monetary cost or physical strain, one receives such a precious reward, how much more so is one deserving of reward for performing *mitzvos* that require one to incur costs and effort?..."

Another *Midrash:* "Reb Elazar ben Yaakov says, 'One must be thankful to G-d when suffering come upon him.' Why is this so? It is because when one experiences suffering in this world, it brings him closer to G-d. As it states, 'The one who G-d loves will be rebuked, as a father rebukes his child...'

"This is the reason King David writes in Psalms, 'Fortunate is the one who is punished by G-d...' If suffering comes upon an individual he must endure it and accept it. Why? It is because the value of overcoming that suffering is unlimited. From where do we derive this? It is extrapolated from the laws of 'a tooth and an eye' regarding a slave.

"The *Torah* tells us that if a master of a Canaanite slave should strike him, causing him to lose a tooth or an eye, the slave becomes emancipated. If the slave is transformed from a chattel to a free man because a small aspect of his being was diminished (the tooth or the eye), how much more so will be the reward to the one who endures great suffering that impacts on his entire being!" Seemingly, there is no comparison between the sending away of the mother bird and what one receives when one endures suffering.

*Rabbeinu Yonah in Shaarei Teshuvah:* There are times that G-d causes one to experience difficulties and



suffering to alert him that he must introspect and make changes in his life. There are times when the suffering itself is an atonement because the individual needs to be purified of sin to be reinstated.

*Midrash*: Regarding the suffering of atonement, it has unlimited value. Regarding the sending away of the mother bird, one performs a positive action, albeit with minimal effort, makes him worthy of great reward. Seemingly, the *Midrash* is drawing from the mother bird that for a minimal effort one receives great reward how much more so will one receive reward for suffering. Sending away the mother bird is a positive commandment, which allows the person to be deserving of reward. However experiencing suffering is for the sake of atonement is so that one could be reinstated and is unrelated to reward. It is only a rehabilitative process. If so what is the basis for comparison?

*Vilna Gaon z'tl* in his famous letter: "One moment of suffering in *geheim* is worse than all the suffering that was experienced by *Eyov*... Nevertheless, when one suffers in the physical world, it has unlimited value, because the suffering that one experiences in his lifetime causes him to not need to suffer in the world to come. As we see regarding the devoutly righteous who suffer in this world, are spared suffering in the world to come because they had already suffered."

If the suffering in *geheim* is at a level that cannot be compared to physical suffering, why is suffering in the physical world sufficient to spare one from suffering in the world to come? The degree of suffering is not comparable. Although the suffering in the world to come is something that is unfathomable; nevertheless, it is not comparable to the suffering in this world, regarding its innate value.

When one suffers in this world, it is within a context of free choice. One can choose to either accept the suffering as an atonement and be thankful to G-d that He is providing him the opportunity to be rehabilitated, or one can chose to be angry with G-d, feeling that it his pain and suffering is unjustified, thus causing him to bolt from G-d. Therefore, when one experiences any level of suffering in this world and processes it with a proper perspective, he will not only be atoned and reinstated for his proper choice, he will also receive reward in the world to come for his positive choice. He will also receive reward in the world to come which is eternal and unlimited for making the positive choice.

## Countering One's Self-Centeredness

*Torah*: "It will be when you enter the Land that *Hashem*, your G-d gives you... and possess it, and dwell in it... 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." The obligation of bringing the first produce (*Bikurim*) came upon the Jewish people only after they had entered into the Land, conquered it, and settled in it.

*Kli Yakar*: We find similarly the obligation of appointing a king, is a *mitzvah* that only came about after they had conquered and settled the Land. "The verse states 'When *Yeshurun* (the Jewish People) became fat (financially secure) he will bolt (from G-d).'" There is a concern that after the Jewish people settle the Land, they will become complacent and thus they will believe that they will have the power to dominate and dictate the law to the king and thus govern the people as they choose. Their hearts will become uplifted and they will forget G-d.

This is the reason the *Torah* dictates that they must appoint a king who G-d will chose so that the king will dominate them and thus they will be subservient to the Will of G-d. Similarly, the *mitzvah* of *Bikurim* is also intended to put things into perspective and allow the Jewish people to understand that they are indebted to G-d who allowed them to enter into the Land and brought about their material success and comfort. They thus, must designate the first of their produce, which is the most special to the farmer to be given to the *Kohen* (as G-d's agent) to acknowledge that they are beneficiaries of G-d's blessing.

*Gemara* in Tractate *Berachos*: "The obligation for the blessing that one recites after the meal is explicit in the *Torah*. However, what is the basis for the blessing that one recites before one partakes of food?" The *Gemara* responds that it is based on the concept of *Kal V'Chomer* (logical deduction, which is one of the thirteen methodologies that were ordained to *Moshe* at Sinai to interpret the Written Law). Just as the *Torah* obligates one to acknowledge G-d after one is sated, is it not logical to say that one must acknowledge G-d before one eats, when one is in a state of hunger?"

*Gemara*: “The reason one recites a blessing before one partakes of food is based on the principle that one who benefits from this world without a blessing (acknowledging G-d as the Master) is considered as if he had benefited from something that was consecrated.”

*Reb Meir Simcha of Dvinsk*: The blessing that one recites before eating is only of Rabbinic nature, while the after blessing (*birchas hamazon*) is a *Torah* obligation. Since the *Gemara* suggests that the basis for the pre-blessing, before one eats, is based on the *Kal’V’Chomer* concept, seemingly the nature of this blessing should assume the force of a *Torah* law. Why is it only Rabbinical? He explains that although the *Gemara* does not explicitly refute the *Kal’V’Chomer*, there is a fallacy in its logic. The *Torah* obligates one to recite a blessing after one is sated because when one is sated one feels complacent and feels secure. In this state of mind, one has a tendency because of his sense of independence, to forget G-d. As the verse states, “When *Yeshurun* (the Jewish People) became fat he will bolt (from G-d).”

The *Torah* therefore obligates one, when he completes his meal, to acknowledge the source of that satiation and complacency – that it due to G-d’s beneficence. However, when one is in a state of hunger and feels in need, one tends to have greater clarity and recognizes the source of his sustenance. At that moment, he is fully cognizant that G-d is his benefactor. Thus, the *Torah* does not require one to recite the pre-blessing before eating.

The *mitzvah* of *bikurim* addresses a similar concern regarding human behavior. One must bring the newly ripened fruits to the Temple from the Land that G-d had endowed him, in order to give thanks to Him. One must acknowledge that the basis for his own existence and the blessing that he has received is only because of the many miracles that G-d had performed on behalf of the Jewish people. It is more than simply acknowledging and thanking G-d for the blessing of the bounty that one has received, it is a recounting of all the events that have come upon the Jewish people from their beginning. This declaration is to understand that every aspect of our existence is due to G-d’s intervention and beneficence.

One cannot forget for a moment that it is only because of G-d’s endowment of blessing that one is able to stand upon the Temple Mount with his new bounty. The bringing and declaration of the *bikurim* is to maintain

a cognizance and clarity similar to the blessing that is recited after meals that is required by the *Torah*. Both of these acknowledgements, *mitzvos* are safeguards for one not to become arrogant and self-centered to believe that his success and accomplishment is due to his own capability.

*Bikurim* and the recitation of the blessing after meals are reminders that everything one has is due to G-d. The obligation of *Bikurim* comes once a year while the obligation of the blessing after meals comes upon the individual whenever one is sated. The obligation of the Sabbatical year comes about every seven years, which is also to acknowledge that one is the beneficiary of G-d’s Kindness.

*Rambam*: Regarding every character trait, one must chose the middle path; however, regarding humility, one must go to the extreme to be humble.

*Mishna in Ethics of our Fathers*: “One must be very very humble...” Indicating that one must totally suppress his ego because a human being has a natural susceptibility to become arrogant.

## Reaping the Fruits of Appreciation

*Torah*: When one brings the newly ripened produce (*bikurim*) to the Temple mount one must make a declaration of appreciation to G-d for all that He had done on behalf of the Jewish people.

*Midrash* citing Psalms: “Let us prostrate ourselves and bow, we should be blessed before *Hashem*, our Maker.’ What is the meaning of this? *Moshe* had seen through his divine vision that in the future the Temple would be destroyed and the bringing of the *bikurim* will come to an end. *Moshe* therefore enacted that the Jewish people must stand before G-d in prayer three times a day (*Amidah*/Silent Prayer). It is because prayer is more beloved to G-d than all good deeds and all the sacrifices. As it states in Psalms, ‘Let my prayer be established before You as the incense offering, and the lifting up of my palms as the evening sacrifice.’”

*Mishna in Ethics of our Fathers*: “The world stands on three principles – *Torah*, Service (*Avodah*/Offerings), and Acts of Loving Kindness.”

*Rabbeinu Yonah* in his commentary on *Ethics of our Fathers*: When the *Mishna* states, “*Torah*, service,

and Acts of Loving Kindness” it is referring to the three objectives of Creation that must be fulfilled. The Temple was the location in which the offerings were brought, thus facilitating the fulfillment of the objective of “*Avodah*” (Service/Offerings).

However, after the Temple was destroyed, because the sacrifices could no longer be brought, *Moshe* legislated that one should stand before G-d in prayer (*Amidah*) three times a day to correspond to the communal offerings that were brought in the morning and the afternoon and the burning of the fats and limbs that was done in the evening. As a result of enacting the three silent prayers, which is the equivalent of the sacrifices, the objective of Creation will be met.

The *Midrash* is seemingly telling us that the legislation of the three silent prayers not only addresses the ceasing of the sacrifices, it also addresses the ending of the bringing of *bikurim*. As it states, “*Moshe* had seen through his divine vision that in the future the Temple would be destroyed and the bringing of the *bikurim* will cease...” In order for one to be able to be appreciative, one must recognize that he is the beneficiary of another’s beneficence. Appreciation is the basis for one to be motivated to reciprocate towards one’s benefactor. When one brings the *bikurim* to the *Kohen* (Priest) one must make a declaration.

*Rashi* citing *Sifrei*: When the *Torah* states, “when he will say...” it means that the individual is declaring that he is not an ingrate. The declaration that he makes to the *Kohen* is an acknowledgement of how he has benefited from G-d in the past and the present.

The first three blessings of the *Amidah* (silent prayer) are classified as “blessings of praise,” to acknowledge who G-d is. The center blessings are requests that pertain to every aspect of our lives. We supplicate G-d for wisdom, intelligence, health, livelihood, etc. When one stands before G-d in the *Amidah* and supplicates G-d for all of one’s needs, it is an admission that without G-d’s endowment he would have nothing. By articulating the needs that relate to every aspect of our lives, we acknowledge that G-d is the Benefactor in all of these areas of request. As a result of this acknowledgement, one becomes appreciative to G-d for His Beneficence. This was the thrust of the bringing of the newly ripened produce.

*Gemara* in Tractate *Berachos*: When one recites the *Amidah*, one must understand and appreciate that he

is standing before G-d, the King. If one were able to have a sense that he is having an audience with G-d it would be the equivalent of standing at the Temple Mount and making the declaration that is associated with the *bikurim*. Because *Moshe* had seen through his divine vision that the Temple was going to be destroyed and the *bikurim* would cease to be, he thus enacted the recitation of the *Amidah* to allow the Jewish people to continue to understand that they are constant beneficiaries of G-d’s beneficence and thus have a sense of appreciation and indebtedness.

The verse states regarding the purpose of Creation, “For My Glory, I created it.” If one understands and appreciates that everything he has is an endowment from G-d, he will not be focused on his own glory, but will realize that glory only has relevance to G-d. *Moshe* appreciated the profound loss of the Temple and the consequence to the Jewish people, he thus needed to legislate something that was the equivalent to the sacrifices and *bikurim*. Understanding the purpose and value of this enactment, we should engage in our silent prayer with full attentiveness to be able to benefit from its purpose.

## **Awakening and Activating One’s Spirituality**

*Torah*: In the fourth year of the Sabbatical Cycle, before the Passover Festival, one must make the confession of the Tithes. “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 ...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* citing *Chazal*: “We have done all that you have decreed upon us. Now, You do what You are responsible to do for us. You had said ‘If you will follow My Statutes and observe My Commandments and perform them; then I will provide for your rains in their time...’” According to *Chazal* cited by *Rashi*, the verse ‘If you will follow My Statutes and observe My Commandments...’ is also referring to the proper distribution of tithes to the *Kohen*, *Levite*, widow, etc.



*Rashi in Bechukosai citing Chazal (Toras Kohanim):* The verse, "If you will follow My Statutes and observe My Commandments and perform them; then I will provide for your rains in their time..." is referring to the one who is deserving of blessing because he toils in *Torah*. How do we reconcile the two statements of *Chazal*? Is the verse, "If you will follow My Statutes..." referring to the distribution of tithes or is it referring to one toiling in *Torah*? The individual who supplicates G-d predicates his request for blessing, "I have done all that you have commanded me....."

*Rashi citing Chazal:* This means "I have rejoiced and have caused others to rejoice." Meaning the individual who is distributing the tithes and bringing the *bikurim* rejoiced when he distributed the tithes and the recipients rejoiced (those who received their rightful portion of grain and produce). It is understandable that the one who receives the tithes would rejoice, because he had received something of value. However, how could the one who distributes a significant portion of his harvest experience joy when he has minimized his profits?

It is only the individual who is sufficiently spiritualized who can appreciate and internalize the innate value of a *mitzvah*. One who has a sense of his spirituality and understands that only through the *mitzvah* can he advance and thus address the purpose of his existence will rejoice. The only way one can achieve a sense of spirituality is through the toil of *Torah*. Because the individual becomes spiritualized through this process he has the capacity to appreciate the value of a *mitzvah*.

Although the individual is foregoing significant percentage of his material accomplishment by giving the tithes and *bikurim*; nevertheless, because of the value of the *mitzvah* of distributing the tithes to the rightful individuals result will bring him joy. This is because he appreciates that the result outweighs the material cost factor. Thus, when one says to G-d, "I have rejoiced and caused others to rejoice" it is a confirmation that the one who is giving the tithes had sufficiently toiled in *Torah* to be able to experience joy when performing these particular *mitzvos*.

*Torah* in the portion of the *Tochacha* (curses): The Jewish people will be subject to the curses because they did not serve G-d with "joy and goodness of heart." This is addressing the Jewish people who were in fact diligent in their observance of the *mitzvos*; however, they did not serve G-d with joy. It is obvious that the

reason they did not serve G-d with joy is because they did not toil sufficiently in *Torah*. They performed the *mitzvos* purely as an obligation and not as a privilege.

Why should these people who observed the *Torah* meticulously be subject to the Wrath of G-d? It is because if one is lacking in joy and good heartedness in his service of G-d, it is a clear indication that he does not truly appreciate and value G-d for what He had given Him. If one would have a sufficient level of appreciation for what G-d had provided him, he would be motivated to eagerly reciprocate with joy to serve G-d the Master. He would see the *mitzvah* as an opportunity and a privilege to do the Will of G-d.

Morning prayers: "How fortunate are we because of our portion and because of our lot." We also recite the Psalm (*ashrei*), "Fortunate is the one who dwells in Your House." If one does not truly toil in *Torah* and is dedicated to its study, although intellectually he sincerely believes what he says in his prayers, he does not sense the reality of that "good fortune."

However, if one does not sense it and declares these various statements it is tinged with dishonesty. The only way that can have a sense of privilege is through a sincere and significant involvement in the study of *Torah*. If this should take place, one will have the capacity to experience the joy of serving G-d and being a member of the Jewish people.

## **The Criteria to Establish Holiness**

*Torah:* "It shall be that if you hearken to the voice of Hashem, your G-d, to observe, to perform all of His commandments ... G-d, will make you supreme over all the nations of the earth. All these blessings will come upon you and overtake you... Blessed shall you be in the city and blessed shall you be in the field. Blessed shall be the fruit of your womb....you will be revered..." If one heeds the Word of G-d, unlimited blessing will come upon him in every aspect of his life.

*Sforno:* "What is the meaning of 'if you hearken to the voice of Hashem?' If one's makes his *Torah* study primary and his material pursuits secondary. It is only then, that all the blessings will come upon you without the need to take the initiative for the material." It is not sufficient to merely observe the *mitzvos* as an adjunct to one's primary focus, which is the pursuit of one's livelihood.

One's *Torah* study must be primary and one's focus in life must be to fulfill the Word of G-d. One's livelihood is only an incidental to accommodate and provide for his material needs. One may think that since one lives in a material world one must focus on the pursuit of the material in order to succeed. How could one have material success without being dedicated to securing one's financial future?

*Torah*: One's material success is an endowment from G-d and not related at all to the degree of initiative that one takes. G-d provides unlimited blessing to the one whose *Torah* study is primary because that individual demonstrates, through his spiritual pursuits, that existence is purely for that objective. However, if one chooses to make his material pursuit primary, he may need to work day and night to achieve his goal. Even at that level of involvement his success is in question. The one who makes his work primary evidently believes that the basis for his success is his own initiative. G-d therefore says, "If that is the case, then you truly must pursue that avenue alone, without My assistance."

*Torah*: "Hashem will establish you for Himself as a holy people, as He swore to you- if you observe the commandments of Hashem, your G-d, and go in His ways." In order assume a profile of holiness the Jew must heed all the commandments and must also walk in the way of G-d to emulate His characteristics.

*Gemara* in Tractate *Shabbos*: "Just as He is merciful you should be merciful; just as He is gracious you should be gracious etc." If the Jew is an embodiment of holiness, he will merit Divine protection and blessing because his essence declares G-d's glory, which is itself a sanctification of G-d's Name. As a result of this advanced state of holiness, "the Name of G-d will be upon you and the nations of the world will revere you."

*Gemara* in Tractate *Yomah*: If one is a *Torah* scholar and behaves in an exemplary manner, he will be admired and esteemed by the masses who will say, "Blessed is the womb that bore him. Blessed is the *Torah* that he has studied." This is a sanctification of G-d's Name.



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