

# The Vindicating Power Of One's Physicality

## YadAvNow.com Weekly Video Series: Ki Savo

Rabbi Yosef Kalatsky

### Bikurim as an Expression of Appreciation

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### Clarity that the Fruit As Well As The Land was Gifted to Us

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### The Ultimate Profile of The First

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### When The Formidable Foe Overwhelms

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### Weathering the Tempest Thru Single Mindedness

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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

#### Limitation has Relevance to the Limited

*Torah:* Regarding the positive commandment of *bikurim* (bringing the first fruits), "It will be when you enter the Land that *Hashem*, your G-d, gives you... that you shall take of the first of every fruit of the ground....and you shall put it in a basket and go to the place that *Hashem*, your G-d will choose...." One must bring the first of his produce to the Temple and make a declaration, "...An Aramean tried to destroy my forefather, He descended to Egypt and sojourned there... *Hashem* heard our voice... *Hashem* took us out..." In this declaration, one gives thanks to G-d for all that He had done for the Jewish people since the time of *Yaakov*, our Patriarch. After one makes the declaration of the first fruits he must prostrate himself before G-d as it states, "You shall prostrate yourself before *Hashem*, your G-d... You shall rejoice with all the goodness that *Hashem*, your G-d has given you...." What is the significance of the prostration?

*Torah:* After *Ephron* agreed to sell the *Machpelah* to *Avraham*, our Patriarch in order for him to be able to bury his wife *Sarah*, *Avraham* prostrated himself before *Ephron* and his community. By doing so, *Avraham* negated himself before *Ephron* and his community. When one prostrates himself before another, he demonstrates that he is no different from the dust of the ground. It is a display of humility. *Avraham's* prostration was an expression of his thankfulness that they had acquiesced to his request.

*Torah:* After *Eliezer*, the servant of *Avraham*, had succeeded in his mission to locate a proper wife for his master's son *Yitzchak* (to be the future Matriarch of the Jewish people), "And it was, when *Avraham's* servant heard their words, he prostrated himself to the ground unto G-d."

*Rashi* citing the *Midrash*: "From here we learn that one must give thanks for good tidings." What *Chazal* draw

from these words is seemingly difficult to understand. The *Torah* only communicates something if it is not obvious. However, in this instance when one receives something of infinite value, it is obvious that one must give thanks. Succeeding his mission to locate *Rivka*, the future Matriarch, how could he even consider not to expressing his thankfulness and indebtedness to G-d for allowing him to succeed. What is the significance of prostration when one offers thanks?

The *Torah* is teaching us that one's degree of appreciation is determined by the degree that one values what he had received. If one minimizes the value of what he receives he may not be appreciative at all. If one feels entitled to an accommodation or the receiving of something, this sense of entitlement will minimize and interfere with his sense of appreciation of what he receives. However, if one is truly humble and feels that he is unworthy, the receiving of the same thing would greatly appreciated.

Regardless of *Eliezer's* degree of humility, any degree of sense of self-value would not allow him to fully appreciate what he received, thus interfering with his expression of thanks to G-d. *Eliezer*, understanding this, prostrated himself before G-d to negate himself in order to have a greater capacity to internalize what G-d had done for him. Thus, he was able to express a greater level of appreciation.

*Midrash*: Therefore, it is from the act of *Eliezer's* prostration that we learn that one must give thanks for good tidings. Meaning, one must do an overt act to give oneself the greatest capacity to appreciate the good that has happened. Similarly, after when brings the first fruits of his bounty to the Temple Mount to offer thanks to G-d, all that had transpired until that point is not considered.

Despite the fact that great toil, labor and investment of self and material was necessary to bring about this produce, the individual only focuses on thanking G-d and expressing his indebtedness to Him. Naturally one would have a sense of entitlement for the bounty of his produce due to his toil and investment. Therefore, the *Torah* obligate one to prostrate oneself, thus negating his self and sense of entitlement. By doing so, one is able to appreciate the beneficence of G-d and be able to truly rejoice.

*Mishnah in Ethics of our Fathers*: One of the miracles that took place in the sanctuary of the Temple was

when the Jewish people would gather there, because of the limitation of space, they stood pressed against one another. However, when they prostrated themselves, there was sufficient room to be fully prostrated on the ground.

Why was there sufficient room for them only when they prostrated themselves and when they stood upright they were pressed against one another? Since prostration is an act of negation, when one bows on the Temple Mount before G-d, one is fully negating himself before the Omnipotent One. At that moment it is as if he no longer exists. Thus, G-d performed a miracle in the Temple to accommodate all those who were present. There was sufficient room for prostration because a finite context only has relevance to those who exist.

*Gemara* in Tractate *Sanhedrin*: The generation of demonstrated an exceptional level of reverence for G-d. Their level of dedication to the study of *Torah* was so exceptional that six individuals were able to be covered with one garment when they engaged in their *Torah* study. How is it possible that one garment could be sufficient for six individuals?

It is because despite their impoverished state, which would normally cause each person to focus on his own needs, each was fully dedicated and invested in the study of *Torah*. This level of dedication is an expression of total negation to G-d and His service. Thus, limitation had no relevance to them. This was founded upon their exceptional reverence to G-d as expressed through the words of King Solomon in Proverbs, "And she (the generation of *Reb Yehudah b'Reb Elae*) shall supersede all of them."

## **To be Imbued with Holiness**

*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 incumbent for Your 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...’”

*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*. If one is fully dedicated to the study of *Torah* at a level that is considered to be “toiling” the rains will come in its time and one will merit unlimited bounty.

How do we reconcile the two interpretations that are given to this verse which seem to be unrelated? The individual who supplicates G-d to gaze upon the Jewish people and provide them blessing predicates his request, “I have done all that you have commanded me....” This is referring to the distribution of tithes that need to be given to various people.

*Rashi* citing *Chazal*: This can mean, “I have rejoiced and have caused others to rejoice.” Meaning, the individual who distributed 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 understood 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 parted with a significant portion of his profits?

It is only the individual who is sufficiently spiritualized who can appreciate and internalize the innate value of a *mitzvah*, although it may be costly. One who has a sense of purpose as a Jew, his spiritual destiny, understands that only through the *mitzvah* can he advance and thus address the purpose of his existence. Thus, he will rejoice. He understands that the only innate value of the material is to accommodate the spiritual. The only way one can develop and 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*.

The individual who distributes his tithes and claims, “I have rejoiced and caused others to rejoice” is the one who is fully imbued with the toil of *Torah*. Thus, the

*Chazal* that is cited by *Rashi* is only a consequence of the interpretation of the *Toras Kohanim* cited by *Rashi* in *Bechukosai*. Therefore, the individual states, “Gaze down from your holy abode and bless us because we have done all You have decreed upon us. Now, do what is incumbent upon You...”

## The Commonality Between the Bikurim and the Amidah

*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).” Thus, the three daily prayer services have replaced the bringing of *bikurim*, that took place only once a year. Evidently, praying the *Amidah* three times a day is the equivalent of coming to the Temple Mount and bringing the *bikurim*.

*Midrash*: “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.’ *Moshe* performed all of the *mitzvos* and was the greatest Jew to ever live. (Nevertheless, despite his worthiness, when it was decreed that he would not be able to enter into the Land he turned to supplication and prayer before G-d in order to overturn the decree.)” We see from *Moshe* that although he was worthy and special in the Eyes of G-d he resorted to prayer to annul the decree. What is the correlation between bringing of the new fruits to the Temple Mount and praying before G-d?

After one brings the *bikurim* one makes a declaration of thanks and indebtedness to G-d for every aspect of all the G-d had endowed him with. The individual acknowledges and thanks G-d for everything that He has done for the sake of the Jewish people since the time of *Yaakov* our Patriarch until the present. The individual then prostrates himself before G-d. The structure of the *Amidah* is comprised of nineteen blessings.

The first three blessings of the *Amidah* (silent prayer) are classified as “blessings of praise,” to acknowledge who G-d is. The middle blessings are requests that

pertain to every aspect of our lives and the Jewish people. 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 and beneficence one would have nothing. By articulating the needs that relate to every aspect of our lives and acknowledging G-d's greatness in the first three blessings of the *Amidah*, one establishes a cognizance of G-d's Mastership and his indebtedness to Him.

In fact, this is the thrust of the bringing of the *bikurim*. However, there is a difference between the bringing of *bikurim* and the prayer service. It was sufficient for one to bring the newly ripened fruits to the Temple Mount once a year. Being exposed to the Divine Presence when performing the service of the *bikurim* was sufficiently impactful to cause a cognizance of G-d and all that He Wills. The experience of bringing the *bikurim* to the *Kohen* on the Temple left an indelible impression upon the individual that was remained with him throughout the entire year. In contrast, in order to accomplish a similar level of awareness and appreciation through prayer, one needs to recite the prayer service three times a day, every day of the year.

*Gemara* in Tractate *Berachos*: The *Amidah* contains eighteen blessings to correspond to the eighteen vertebrae in the human spinal column. Every blessing of the *Amidah* corresponds to one of the vertebrae. Jewish law dictates that when one bows in the *Amidah* one must bow from the waist to the point that his vertebrae separate. This is the degree to which one must submit himself to G-d.

*Gemara* in Tractate *Berachos*: "One should bend like a rod and rise like a snake." Bowing at the waist to the point that one's vertebrae separate is a gesture of acknowledgment that one is totally subservient and dependent upon G-d for all that he possesses and receives. One must understand and internalize the fact that all that he has, is an endowment from G-d. It is only through this degree of continuous submission and negation that one can be affected in a manner similar to bringing the *bikurim* in the Temple.

*Torah* in *Devarim*: "Moshe said to the Children of Israel: And Now, O Israel, what is *Hashem*, your G-d, asking of you?"

*Chofetz Chaim* in his work *Ahavas Chesed*: A Jew must continuously ask himself, "What does G-d want from me at this moment?" A Jew must maintain a continuous

cognizance of G-d and thus subject every decision to this level of scrutiny. Regardless of one's abilities, background, or orientation one's perspective must be "What does G-d want from me now?" If one truly lives his life in this context, then he will be continuously cognizant of G-d and His Beneficence. This can be accomplished through reciting the three daily prayer services with sufficient reverence and negation of one's self.

## The Ramification of Entering into the Covenant

*Torah*: "You have distinguished (*haamarta*) *Hashem* today to be a G-d for you, and to walk in His ways...And *Hashem* has distinguished you today to be for Him a treasured people..." What is the meaning of the word, "*haamarta* (distinguished)?"

*Rashi*: "It is a word that connotes being separated and set aside from everything. G-d says, 'You have separated Me from the false gods to be your G-d. Therefore, I have separated you from the nations of the world to be My treasure. Another interpretation of the word '*haamarta*' is 'glorification.' Just as the Jewish people chose to glorify G-d so too did He glorify them (measure for measure)."

*Sforno*: "You have distinguished (*haamarta*) *Hashem* today to be a G-d for you..." to mean, "You agreed to enter into the covenant with an oath, understanding the grave consequences if you should violate this oath. If one violates this oath he will suffer great material losses... G-d says to the Jewish people, 'When you agreed to enter into the covenant it was as if you declared that serving Me and doing My Will is more important to you than anything in the physical realm, regardless of its material value. Because you chose to forfeit all material good for the sake of adhering to My covenant and having a relationship with Me, I will esteem you..."

*Torah* in *Re'eh*: "See, I present before you today a blessing and a curse."

*Sforno*: "The *Torah* states that G-d is presenting the Jewish people two extremes. The blessing in the positive and the curse in the negative. The way of the Jew will not be as one who is in the middle (*beinoni*), as is the way of the world. Thus, G-d only presents the two ultimate extremes because these are the only options available for to the Jew.

“If one is worthy of blessing, he will receive great bounty that is outside the realm of nature. If one sins, he will have a curse that will come upon him which will cause him to be diminished to such a degree that even achieving what is minimal will be difficult. There is no interim state for the Jew.” A Jew has a continuous obligation to be engaged in performing the Will of G-d. If he is not, it is not considered that he is in a neutral position but rather he is not adhering to G-d’s objective for him. The objective of the Jew to continuously bring Glory to Him.

When the Jewish people agreed to enter into the covenant with G-d it was a declaration that they were willing to give up their materiality for the sake of G-d. Because they were willing to sacrifice their materiality, G-d esteems them as His treasure. This level of dedication is expressed through the recitation of the *Shema*. When one recites the *Shema*, one is declaring that he will love G-d with all of his heart, his soul, and his material assets.

## **Amalek, G-d’s Archenemy**

*(from Ki Seitzei)*

*Torah:* “Remember what *Amalek* did to you, on the way when you were leaving Egypt...” It is a positive commandment to remember what *Amalek* had done to the Jewish people after the Exodus and to recite the verses of the *Torah* that recall this event. The *Amalekites* attacked the Jewish people after G-d had destroyed Egypt with the ten plagues and split the Sea on behalf of the Jewish people and destroyed the Egyptian armies when the Sea closed upon them. The entire world was in awe of the Jewish people and stood in trepidation from their aura. In contrast, the *Amalekites* were not affected or impressed in any way by all the miracles that had been performed on behalf of G-d’s people. They thus attacked the Jewish people without compunction.

*Torah:* Regarding the prophecy of *Bilaam*, “*Amalek* was first among the nations (to attack the Jewish people), but in the end they will face utter destruction.” G-d says, “My Throne will not be complete until the name of *Amalek* is obliterated from under the heavens.” *Amalek*’s objective is to uproot whatever has any semblance of G-dliness. Thus, anything that is associated with *Amalek* will have no relevance to G-d, and will thus be cut off from the source of all life at the end of time.

This is because *Amalek* was the first nation to attack the Jewish people. What was the consequence of the attack of *Amalek*?

After the splitting of the Sea, during which there were revealed miracles that were beyond those that were displayed in the ten plagues of Egypt, the nations of the world trembled from the Jewish people because they understood that they were the chosen people of G-d and there was nothing that He would not do for them. It is stated in the Ten Commandments, “Do not covet your fellow’s house... your fellow’s wife... nor anything that belongs to your fellow.” How is it possible for one who has an interest in his fellow’s belongings to control this inappropriate desire?

*Ibn Ezra* explains this with an allegory. When the Prince chooses to marry the Princess, regardless of her beauty and other qualities, a commoner does not envy the Prince for marrying her. This is because the commoner understands with certainty that the Princess has no relevance to him as a commoner. There is no basis for consideration, since she is not within the context of his choice.

Identically, if one would understand and internalize that every individual’s personal predicament is unique and specific for that person through G-d’s endowment, then he will not be envious of his fellow’s successes or possessions because they have no relevance to his existence. If one in fact does have designs on his fellow’s possessions it is only because he did not internalize this belief and reality.

After the splitting of the Sea, the nation of the world regarded the Jewish people as nation that had no relevance to them because of their exalted status. They were regarded by the world as the commoner views the daughter of the king. The nations understood that the Jewish people are G-d’s children and they are not.

However, as a consequence of the attack of *Amalek*, the aura of the Jewish people was diminished. They were no longer regarded as a nation that existed on another level, but rather, they were as vulnerable as any other people. *Amalek* had succeeded in defusing the awe and reverence that the nations of the world had for the Jewish people and thus they began to regard the Jewish people not as the children of the Omnipotent G-d but as being no different from them. As a result of the sin of the golden calf the world did not achieve its level of perfection.

*Gemara:* At the time of the receiving of the *Torah* at Sinai, the spiritual status of the Jewish people reverted back to the status of *Adam* before he ate from the Tree of Knowledge. Had they not sinned with the golden calf, they would have succeeded in perfecting the world. However, because they did sin, they fell to the spiritual level of *Adam* after the sin of the eating of the Tree of Knowledge.

*Chazal:* The reason the Jewish people failed with the sin of the golden calf was because the *Torah* was given in a public setting. The nations of the world gave the evil eye to the Jewish people and thus made them vulnerable to the sin of the golden calf. Based on the explanation of the *Ibn Ezra*, because the *Torah* was given in a public setting, the nations of the world believed that they too had relevance to it. Because of that, they were envious of the Jewish people and thus gave them the evil eye, which resulted in sin of the golden calf.



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