

The Vindicating Power Of One's Physicality

YadAvNow.com Weekly Video Series: Ki Savo

Rabbi Yosef Kalatsky

Bikurim: Only at the Time of Simcha

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Accepting Hashem's Dominion Upon Entering the Land

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Your People, Yisroel

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Observe Torah as Prescribed & Nations of the World Will Revere You

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Bikurim Only Upon Conquering the Land

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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. Safety mechanism suggested by Chazal: Choose for yourself a teacher & acquire for yourself a friend.

Weekly Torah Commentary Series: Ki Savo



The Vindicating Power Of One's Physicality

Establishing A Commonality with G-d

Torah: "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." There is a positive commandment to bring the newly ripened fruits of the seven species of Israel to the sanctuary of the Temple. When one brings the newly ripened produce, he must declare his indebtedness to G-d for all that He had done for him until that moment. The bringing of the produce is an expression of that gratitude. The only one qualified to partake of this produce is the *Kohen* (Priest). The ritual of the bringing of the new produce concludes with one prostrating himself in the sanctuary to indicate his negation of self to G-d and his recognition of Him as the Benefactor.

Rabbeinu Bachya in his introduction to *Ki Savo*: Expounding on the concept of *reishis* (first) which

is the essence of the *Bikurim*, the Jewish people themselves are referred by G-d to as *reishis* (first), as it states, "The Jewish people holy to G-d as they are the equivalent of the first tithe of the wheat (*reishis tevuasa*)."
As the Chosen People, they are the chosen of all nations. The *Kohen* is the chosen of the chosen people to be the officiant of G-d in the Temple. The location of the Temple mount is the most special location in existence. G-d himself is the beginning and the essence of everything. The characteristic that He possesses is "*Reishis*" – first and foremost.

Rabbeinu Bachya: There is a commonality of "*reishis*" throughout the entire *Bikurim* ritual. One brings the choicest of his produce (*reishis*) to the Temple Mount, which is the choicest of locations, by the Jew who is the chosen of all nations, on behalf of G-d who is the First and Ultimate. The first produce is given to the *Kohen* who is the chosen of the chosen people. What is the significance of this commonality?

Gemara in Tractate *Pesachim*: There is a positive commandment for one to cleave to G-d (*bo tidbok*). "If G-d is the equivalent of fire, how can one attach himself to fire? One should associate himself closely with a *Torah* scholar. One should marry his daughter to the *Torah* scholar, provide him with business opportunity, and eat and drink with him."

One should be associated with a *Torah* scholar in many aspects of his life in order to have a relationship with him in order to learn from his ways because he possesses G-d's Wisdom, which is the *Torah*. Through this degree of association one will gain a profound appreciation and reverence for G-d and thus fulfill the positive commandment of "To Him you shall cleave/attach yourself." This is also similar to the positive commandment of "You shall walk in His ways..." Why does G-d want the Jewish people to emulate Him?

Torah: "But you who cling to *Hashem*, your G-d- you are all alive today (*V'atem hadevakim B'Shem Elokeichem chayim kulchem hayom*)."

Maharal of Prague: Since the Jewish people cleave to G-d, they are rooted to the source of all existence. Thus, they are fully functional and blessed because of their level of attachment to G-d. The Jew has relevance to eternity only because he has relevance to G-d, who is eternal. If one were to sever his connection to G-d, then he would not have any relevance to eternity, the world to come. Because of the profile of the Jewish people, being the first and the choicest, they have a commonality with G-d. Thus, the *mitzvah* of *Bikurim* which reflects this characteristic of "first, foremost, and chosen" is reflected in all aspects of the *mitzvah*. The greater that the Jew emulates the ways of G-d, the more he establishes a stronger commonality with Him, thus allowing him to cleave to a greater degree.

Service of Heart, The Mainstay of Judaism

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 received.

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 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.'" Why is prayer more beloved to G-d than all good deeds and all of the sacrifices?

When one brings the *Bikurim* and declares his indebtedness to G-d, one demonstrates through his declaration that he understands and appreciates that every aspect of his good fortune is only an endowment from G-d. G-d is the sole Benefactor. After one performs the ritual of the *Bikurim*, which is in the Sanctuary of the Temple, one prostrates himself before G-d. Prostration is a negation of one's self allowing one to internalize all that he had stated. This bringing of the *Bikurim* is an opportunity that allows one to appreciate and understand that one's own initiative brings about success only because G-d Wills it to be so.

The *mitzvah* of *Bikurim* and the location of the Temple are essential for keeping one's focus regarding G-d's involvement in one's life. If the Temple should be destroyed and the *mitzvah* of *Bikurim* should cease, one will naturally fall victim to the inclination of man to believe that he is the master of his own success. As it states, "My strength and the power of my arm have brought about this success." *Moshe*, understanding the consequence of the destruction of the Temple and the ending of the *Bikurim* ritual, he enacted that the Jew must stand in prayer three times a day before G-d. Seemingly, this would compensate for the void that will occur as a result of the destruction of the Temple.

Gemara in Tractate *Berachos*: Standing before G-d in prayer is the equivalent of having an audience with the King (G-d Himself). Every Jew has the opportunity to have an audience with G-d so that he could acknowledge Him as the Omnipotent Being and supplicate Him for his needs. In the blessings of the *Amidah*, one requests from G-d to have wisdom, repentance, forgiveness, health and healing, redemption, and success. By beseeching G-d three times a day through the recitation of the *Amidah*, one will maintain an ongoing cognizance that G-d is the One Who endows every aspect of one's life. Thus, the recitation of the *Amidah* three times a day is standing before G-d and humbling oneself by requesting every aspect of one's existence.

Mishna in Ethics of our Fathers: One should not recite his prayers as something that is forced to do. One must express himself as one who is truly needy. If it not were for G-d's beneficence, one must truly believe that he could not exist. When one recognizes the good that had been bestowed upon him (*hakaras hatov*) he will have a sense of indebtedness and thus have a need to reciprocate by serving Him.

Rambam: One is obligated, on a *Torah* level, to pray once a day and the additional two prayer services are rabbinical enactments. However, all agree that all three prayer services are needed to maintain one's clarity in recognizing that G-d is the One who continuously fulfills every aspect of our lives.

Midrash: Prayer is more beloved to G-d than all good deeds and all the sacrifices. Why is this so? *Mitzvos* are actions through which one demonstrates his servitude to G-d; however, prayer, because it is supplications, will bring about a level of humility and negation before G-d. The *Mitzvos* are an actualization of the mindset of the individual. The essence of a *mitzvah* is the intent that is infused into it.

Chazal: A *mitzvah* that is performed without feeling is similar to a body without a soul. Therefore, prayer, which it itself is the supplication is the ultimate expression of one's neediness (for G-d). Prayer will ultimately evoke a level of indebtedness to G-d.

Sensing One's Own Spiritual Essence

Torah: 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 ... 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 referring to the proper distribution of tithes to the *Kohen*, Levite, widow, etc.

Rashi in *Bechukosai* citing *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 toils in *Torah*. How do we reconcile the two statements of *Chazal*?

The individual predicates his request for blessing, "I have done all that you have commanded me...."

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

It is only when one understands and internalizes the innate value of a *mitzvah* that one can rejoice. One who has a sense of his spirituality and understands that only through the *mitzvah* can he advance and become spiritualized will rejoice. The only way one can have a sense of his spiritual essence is through toiling in *Torah*. It is only through that process, can one appreciate the innate value of spiritual accomplishment. Therefore, although the individual is foregoing significant material worth never the less, because of its spiritual result, he is able to rejoice. 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.

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 diligent in the observance of all *Mitzvos*, but did not serve G-d with joy. Why should these people who fulfilled the *Torah* in its entirety 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 in fact

does a sufficient level of appreciation he would be overwhelmed with joy for the privilege of being able to serve G-d his Master.

We recite every evening in the blessing that precedes the *Shema*: “We will discuss Your decrees and we will rejoice with the words of Your *Torah* and with Your commandments for all eternity. For they are our life and the length of our days and about them we will meditate day and night.” We see that it is only through the study of *Torah* on a continuous basis that one can have a sense of his own spirituality. It is only when one attains the sense of his essence, which is his spirituality, will he rejoice in performing the *Mitzvos*, regardless of the cost factor. However, if one makes his livelihood primary and his *Torah* study secondary, he will not have a sense of his spirituality and thus perform the *Mitzvos* begrudgingly.

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.” The *Torah* continues, “*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.

The Perception of Oneself is the Determining Factor (from *Ki Seitzei*)

Torah: “Remember what *Amalek* did to you, on the way when you were leaving Egypt...you shall obliterate the memory of *Amalek* from under the heaven- you shall not forget!”

Midrash: “*Reb Tanchuma* began to lecture and cited a verse from *Eyov*, ‘Your remembrances are similar to ash, the mortar will be on your backs...’ What is the meaning of this? G-d said to the Jewish people, ‘You should be diligent with the two remembrances that I have written in the *Torah*. You must remember what *Amalek* had done to you. You must also remember to obliterate them because of what they had done. When you will remember these two remembrances you will be similar to ash.’ What is the meaning of this?”

“When you will remember, you will merit to be seen as the descendants of *Avraham*, who had valued himself as ash.’ As *Avraham* had said, ‘I am like dust and ash.’ If you will not remember what *Amalek* had done to you and not obliterate them as a result of that memory, then the mortar shall be on your back. You will be as slaves as you had been in Egypt. As it states, ‘They embittered their lives with hard work.’” Why are these two remembrances a prerequisite to being regarded by G-d as the descendants of *Avraham*, our Patriarch?

Midrash: The attack of the *Amalekites* against the Jewish people after the splitting of the Sea and the destruction of the Egyptian armies is analogous to a fool jumping into a scalding bath that others are afraid to go near because they do not wish to be scalded. Although the fool who entered into the bath is burnt; he nevertheless cools down the water for others to enter.

After the splitting of the Sea and the destruction of Egypt by G-d on behalf of the Jewish people, the nations of the world stood in awe of them because an aura had been created. The nations of the world were afraid to engage and approach the Jewish people. However, after the *Amalekites* had attacked them, their special aura was diminished. The Jewish people were no longer seen as extraordinary. Before the attack of the *Amalekites*, because of their special aura, the Jewish people would have functioned as a role model in belief and behavior to the world. However, after they were attacked by the *Amalekites*, this was no longer so. Thus, the attack of the *Amalekites* is considered to be the ultimate desecration of G-d’s Name.

Therefore, G-d said, “You must remember what *Amalek* did to you... you shall obliterate...” Since the verse states, “You must remember what *Amalek* did to you...” and not simply “You must remember what *Amalek* did...” the words “to you” indicate that *Amalek*’s attack was personal and specific to the Jewish people. Why is this so? G-d destroyed Egypt and split the Sea on behalf of Jewish people. He had altered nature and brought about

supernatural events that had never taken place before on their behalf. It was a clear indication to the world that He valued the Jewish people above all other nations.

The Jewish people were meant to be His representation in existence. The purpose and objective of the Jew in existence is a spiritual one and not physical. The physical is only a means to a spiritual end. The world was only created for G-d’s Glory. Regardless of the dimension of miracle in Egypt and the splitting of the Sea, the *Amalekites* remained oblivious to all that had transpired. They had not been affected or impressed as the other nations of the world. Their attack was specifically against the Jewish people because they were G-d’s representation in existence. If the Jewish people remember what had transpired with *Amalek* they will appreciate their own role in existence and thus act on G-d’s directive to obliterate *Amalek*. They will thus be seen by G-d as the children of *Avraham*, who had given his life for the Creator.

Avraham, our Patriarch, confronted and opposed the world through his espousal of monotheism. He dedicated his life to the glorification of G-d’s Name. He was willing to be thrown into the fiery kiln of *Kasdim* and turned into ash, rather than bowing to the idol. Although the world had seen his actions as irrational, because of *Avraham*’s pursuit and grasp of truth, he rejected the pagan beliefs of the world. One would think that his decision was not rational.

To *Avraham*, the world’s view was irrational. If the Jewish people do not identify themselves as G-d’s people by remembering the reason *Amalek* had attacked them then they will see themselves no different from the nations of the world. Just as the beast of burden is meant to live a life of mastership, so too will the Jew be subject to hard physical labor – “the mortar will be on your backs” The *mitzvah* of remembering what *Amalek* had done to the Jewish people is pivotal because it is one that causes the Jew to remember who he is – G-d’s representation in existence.



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