

The Vindicating Power Of One's Physicality

YadAvNow.com Weekly Video Series: Ki Savo Rabbi Yosef Kalatsky

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.

Reflective of His Profile is Innately Holy

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Begrudging of His Kindness, Blessing is Terminated

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Hour-Long Video: The Vindicating Power Of One's Physicality

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Weekly Torah Commentary Series: Ki Savo



The Vindicating Power Of One's Physicality

One's Expression of Thankfulness

"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 (of the seven species) to the Temple and make a declaration in which one gives thanks to G-d for all that He has done for him and the Jewish people since the time of their beginnings, the time of *Yaakov* our Patriarch. The declaration is an expression of the individual's gratitude to G-d.

The tribes of *Reuvain* and *Gad* had abundant livestock so they needed vast grazing lands in order to provide for their livestock. Because they greatly valued their wealth, they were willing to settle outside of the Land of Israel, which was given by G-d to the Jewish people in order to provide sufficient grazing land for their livestock.

Midrash: Reb Yossi states that the produce of the trans-Jordan side of Israel is not obligated in *bikurim*. "One

is obligated to bring *bikurim* only from the Land that G-d gave to them but not from a location that they had taken for themselves." Seemingly, because the tribes of *Reuvain* and *Gad* chose to settle the trans-Jordan side due to their own initiative, it is excluded from the obligation of bringing *bikurim*. This is because it is not the land that was given to them by G-d.

These tribes would have not been able to settle the trans-Jordan side without G-d's approval and endorsement. If G-d allowed them to settle there, why should it be excluded from the obligation of *bikurim*? Why is it considered as if they had "taken it for themselves" which seems to be unrelated to G-d?

The ritual of the *bikurim* and the declaration is to express one's indebtedness to G-d for all the good that He has bestowed upon the individual and the Jewish people. Declaring one's appreciation for what G-d had done on his behalf is based on one's full recognition that he is a beneficiary of G-d's Beneficence. The reason it is so difficult for one to see himself as the

beneficiary of another is because one does not want to see himself as a debtor and thus bound to another.

Regarding the Land of Israel proper, which was gifted by G-d to the Jewish people since the time of the Patriarchs, it is without question that this Land is unrelated to any initiative. Therefore, because one cannot regard the Land of Israel in any other way, one is obligated to express his gratitude to G-d.

However, the trans-Jordan side of Israel which only manifested itself as a portion for the Jewish people due to the initiative and request of the tribes of *Reuvain* and *Gad*, the ability for one to clearly recognize that he a total beneficiary of G-d's Kindness is more difficult. One can rationalize and say that it is true that if it were not for G-d's endorsement we would not have our portion; however, simultaneously had it not been for our request it would not have been necessary. Therefore, G-d did not include the produce of the trans-Jordan side of Israel in the *mitzvah* of *bikurim*.

Midrash: There were two greatly wealthy individuals who existed in the world, one of whom was Jewish and the other from the nations of the world - *Korach* and *Haman*. They were both destroyed from the world because the gift of wealth that they had was not from G-d but rather it was something that they grabbed for themselves.

We see regarding the tribes of *Reuvain* and *Gad* that they had abundant livestock. They greatly valued their wealth. It is because of their endearment to their wealth, that they were willing to settle outside of the Land of Israel and separate themselves from their Jewish brethren. They were the first of the tribes to be exiled before the destruction of the First Temple.

We see from the *Midrash* that the wealth that the tribes of *Reuvain* and *Gad* had was something that they had "grabbed" for themselves rather than it being a gift from G-d.

The *mitzvah* of *bikurim* is something that has relevance only to something that is a gift from G-d and not seized by the individual. The fact that one is able to seize something although it was not initially meant for them is based on the principle stated in the *Gemara*: "In the path in which one chooses to walk, G-d will lead him."

If one desires to be evil, G-d will present him with many situations to actualize his intent and desire. In contrast, if one is destined by heaven to receive wealth, then

that endowment is considered a gift from G-d and it will have positive value. However, if one "grabs" wealth such as *Korach* and *Haman*, because he desires it, it will ultimately lead to tragedy and not to blessing.

Since the trans-Jordan side was not a gift from G-d as the Land of Israel was, it is something that is considered to be "grabbed." Because the tribes of *Reuvain* and *Gad* "grabbed" the land, it had negative ramifications that lead to negative results such as being the first tribes to be exiled.

Because the first produce is an expression of thankfulness and indebtedness for something that is truly a gift from G-d, it is something that truly engenders blessing.

Declaration, the Ultimate

"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." One must bring the first of his produce to the Temple and make a declaration to the *Kohen*, "And you will say to him...An *Aramean* tried to destroy my forefather..."

In this declaration, one gives thanks to G-d and recounts all that He had done for himself and the Jewish people since the time of *Yaakov*, our Patriarch.

Rashi: When the *Torah* states, "And you will say to him ..." it means that the individual is declaring, "I am not an ingrate (*kafui tova*)."

After the Jewish people had benefited from the Manna in the desert for forty years, they complained saying, "...our soul is disgusted with this insubstantial food (*lechem haklokel*)."

The Manna nourished and sustained the Jewish people for forty years. It was completely absorbed in the innards without expelling any waste. After ingesting and being sustained with this miracle food, which was the same sustenance of the angels, they complained regarding their abnormal level of existence. They said that since they had been ingesting this type of food for many years and not expelling it from their bodies, they were concerned that it would ultimately expand in their bodies and cause them to die.

In response to their complaints, G-d sent venomous serpents to bite them and there were many casualties.

Gemara: After the Jewish people complained about the Manna, G-d characterized the Jewish people by saying, "You are ingrates who descend from an ingrate."

This is referring to them as the descendants of *Adam*, who was the original ingrate of the human species. After *Adam* had transgressed the Word of G-d by eating of the Tree of Knowledge, G-d confronted him by asking, "Why did you eat from the tree of knowledge?" *Adam* responded by saying, "I ate because of the wife that You have given me." This implied that G-d was the cause of his failing. It was due to *Chava's* insistence that he had eaten of the Tree.

However, the reason G-d had created a wife for *Adam* was for his full benefit. She was to be his helpmate in order to assist him in achieving a state of spiritual perfection. However, rather than acknowledging the ultimate good that G-d had provided for him, *Adam* perceived it as a curse. He attributed the cause of his failing to his wife, linking G-d with his own transgression. G-d therefore classified him as an "ingrate (*kafui tova*)."

Gemara: If one comes upon *chametz* (leavened product) on *Pesach*, he is not permitted to move it because it is a forbidden substance that has no relevance to the day (*muktsa*). One must cover it with a vessel to indicate that it is not available for his usage. The term that the *Gemara* uses regarding the covering of the *chometz* is "*kofeh*" which is "to turn over".

The meaning of "*kafui tova*" is to turn over something that is innately good and beneficial and regard it as something detrimental and destructive. Although G-d provided *Adam* and the Jewish people with things that were innately and ultimately good in the most absolute sense, they both classified these gifts as the ultimate detriment and the cause of their demise.

When one brings the *bikurim* to the Temple Mount, one declares that he is not an ingrate by acknowledging the good that G-d had provided on behalf of the Jewish people and appreciating one's level of indebtedness to Him.

The obligation of *bikurim* came about after the conquest of the Land and the dividing of the Land. This obligation came about prior to the first three *mitzvos* that were incumbent upon the Jewish people, which were the destruction of *Amalek*, the appointment of a king, and the building of the Temple.

They needed to bring the first produce to express their indebtedness to G-d. What was the value of giving the Jewish people the *mitzvah* of *bikurim* at this time?

Yechezkel the prophet states, "You (the Jewish people) are called *adam* (man)."

Gemara: The verse implies that the nations of the world are not referred to as "*adam*" because their spirituality is not as advanced as the Jew. G-d created *Adam* with a unique dimension of spirituality that had the potential and capacity to perfect himself and existence through his service of G-d. The entire world was created to accommodate and facilitate this objective.

However, because he sinned by eating of the Tree of Knowledge, he forfeited that level of spiritual potential. After his spiritual decline, *Adam* expressed himself as an ingrate to G-d by perceiving the ultimate good as the cause of his failing.

The Jewish people assumed their unique level of spirituality at *Sinai* when they received the *Torah* and became G-d's people. At that time they assumed the spiritual profile of *Adam* before he spiritually putrefied himself with sin. Therefore, when the Jewish people entered into the Land, which is the location of the Divine Presence, they were obligated to declare that they do not identify with the characteristic of being an ingrate.

Through the declaration of the *bikurim* they declared to G-d that they do not reflect the attribute *Adam* had after he sinned. Rather, they were at the level of *Adam* before the sin when he had the dimension of spiritual potential to perfect existence. Through the declaration of the *bikurim* the Jew acknowledges that he recognizes the good and thus reflects the profile of the original *Adam*.

The Spiritualization of the Individual

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: We have done all that You have decreed upon us. Now, do what is 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....'

"If you will follow My Statutes and observe My Commandments and perform them..." (*Bechukosai*)

Toras Kohanim: This is referring to the one who is toils in Torah and is therefore deserving of blessing. If one is fully dedicated to the study of *Torah* at a level that is considered to be "toiling," the rains will come in their time and one will merit unlimited bounty.

How do we reconcile *Rashi's* application of this verse regarding the distribution of the tithes and the *Toras Kohanim* who explains that the bounty is contingent on the toiling in *Torah*?

The individual who supplicates G-d to gaze upon him and the Jewish people and provide them with His blessing predicates on, "I have done all that you have commanded me..." This is referring to the distribution of tithes that need to be given to various segments of the Jewish people.

Rashi: "I have rejoiced and have caused others to rejoice." The one who distributed the various tithes and brought 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 received something of value that he did not have before. However, how could the one who distributes a significant portion of his harvest experience joy when he has given away a significant portion of his profit?

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 an understanding of his purpose in existence as a Jew understands that it is only through the performance of *mitzvos* that he can advance his spirituality and thereby justify his existence.

Therefore, this individual, upon distributing the tithes, will rejoice. It is only through an advanced level of spiritualization, which comes through the toiling in *Torah*, that one has the capacity to esteem and appreciate the unlimited value of a *mitzvah* despite its cost. The individual who distributes his tithes and declares, "I have rejoiced and caused others to rejoice" is the one who is fully imbued through the toil of *Torah*.

Based on the words of the Prophet, "I have created it (the world) for My Glory (*l'chvodie barasiv*)..." the individual who is imbued through *Torah* and thus has the sense of the innate value of the material, will surely utilize G-d's unlimited blessing only for that purpose. The *Torah* therefore states, "If you toil in My statutes (My *Torah*)..." Then the bounty will be unlimited.

Maintaining the Viability of Torah

"(Moshe said to the Jewish people), this day (*hayom*), Hashem, your G-d commands you to perform these decrees and the statutes, and you will observe and perform them with all your heart and all your soul."

Rashi: Each day the *mitzvos* should be new in your eyes as if you were commanded today (by G-d) to do them.

Chazal: "Today" alludes to the fact that the *mitzvos* of the Torah must remain "new" in one's eyes. This is because, a new proclamation is seen as special to the one who hear it, compared to a proclamation of the past, in which one loses interest.

If one regards the *Torah* and its *mitzvos* as something that is not unique and special (because they are of the past), one's interest and focus will wane and eventually dissipate. He will feel as if his time is being infringed upon, and he will perform them begrudgingly.

One must maintain the newness of *Torah* in his eyes so that he should perform the *mitzvos* with motivation and joy. It is understood that in order for one to revere and esteem something, it must be regarded as special. When one sees something as "new," it automatically becomes special to him and he will focus more upon it.

If one has an obligation to adhere to the commandments of G-d throughout one's life with reverence and love, with the same degree as if they were given today, how can one maintain such a level of newness regarding the *mitzvos* and the study of *Torah* every day?

Chazal: At the time of the giving of the *Torah* at *Sinai*, the Jewish people stood with "awe and trepidation." At that time they had a such a unique level of all-consuming fear and awe of G-d that they understood to accept and appreciate every word of the *Torah* at a level that cannot be fathomed.

We see from the words of *Moshe* to the Jewish people regarding the observance of *mitzvos* that one must

have minimally a semblance of such a level of reverence and awe continuously, as if one stood himself at *Sinai* on that day to receive the *Torah*.

Gemara: “I (G-d) have created the evil inclination and the *Torah* as its antidote.” The only antidote for the evil inclination is the *Torah*. One cannot succeed in diminishing and dispelling his inclination without the Divine Assistance that he is given through the *Torah*.

Every day one is confronted with the evil inclination. One opinion states that the evil inclination comes to the person every day in a guise of newness. Although one may have transgressed in a certain area many times, the evil inclination has the ability to convince the individual to sin again by presenting the sin as a new and attractive opportunity.

If the *Torah* that one studies is not regarded and internalized as “new,” then it will not be able to counter the evil inclination as an antidote that will incapacitate and dispel it. The *Torah* must have the same level of vitality and viability as the evil inclination, which renews itself every day.

“If you will continuously hearken to My commandments (*im shemoa tishma*)...”

Gemara: “If you learned the old (listened) then you will listen to the new.” If one retains what he had studied in the past, he will come upon new horizons of understanding of the *Torah*. The *Torah* will thus remain “new” in his eyes.

If one engages in *Torah* study and one does not have a sense of its newness (coming upon levels of new understanding), one must ask himself why? It is an indication that the individual truly did not retain sufficiently what he had studied in the past and thus does not have sense and understanding in the future.

This is true even if one studies the same area of *Torah* many times. It will continuously seem new and exhilarating if one had sufficiently studied and retained what he had learned in the past.

Chasam Sofer: There was not a day in his life that he did not come upon new horizons and understanding in his *Torah* study. He understood that if his *Torah* study of the past was intact and sufficiently retained as it should have been, then he would be able to come upon new understandings in the present. If he would not have the ability to come upon a new insight, it would have

been an indication that he did not sufficiently study or retain what he had studied in the past.

Remembering G-d's Kindness

“You shall not pervert the judgment of a proselyte or orphan, and you shall not take the garment of a widow as collateral. You shall remember that you were a slave

in Egypt, and *Hashem*, your G-d redeemed you from there; therefore I command you to do this thing.”

What is the relevance of remembering that one was once a slave in Egypt who was redeemed by G-d to the mistreatment of a convert, widow, or orphan?

Rashi: G-d commanded the Jewish people to adhere to His ordinances although it may lead to a financial loss. You must remember that G-d was the One Who redeemed you from Egypt. The verse is referring to the taking of collateral from an individual who is in a precarious financial state, such as a widow, orphan, or proselyte.

Ramban: The verse is referring to the convert (unrelated to the collateral of the widow). Since the Jewish people were strangers in a land that was not theirs (Egypt), they must be sensitive to the plight of the convert. Just as the Jewish people were strangers in Egypt and G-d redeemed them, so too they should not mistreat the convert.

Chazal: The redemption of the Jewish people from Egypt was an act of G-d's unlimited kindness (*chesed*). While it is true that the Jewish people were qualified and merited to be redeemed because they retained their identity as Jews, such as not changing their language (Hebrew), their Jewish names and their attire, they were nevertheless pagans (idolaters) as the Egyptians were. Being detached and alienated from all levels of spirituality caused them not to be worthy of having a relationship with G-d. Despite this, because of G-d's unlimited Kindness, He brought about their redemption from Egypt.

Shalah HaKadosh: The redemption from Egypt was the equivalent of the beginning of a new Creation. It culminated at *Sinai* when the Jewish people became G-d's chosen people through the receiving of His *Torah*. Prior to that event, they had no relevance to G-d.

Just as G-d initially at the time of Creation brought about existence due to His Kindness, as King David writes, “The world was created through His Kindness

Olam Chesed Yebane,” so too the redemption came about due to G-d’s attribute of Kindness.

Gemara: Everything is predestined by heaven, except for the fear of heaven. All aspects of one’s life is willed and endowed by G-d. There is nothing that is dependent on one’s initiative (choice) other than his fear of heaven.

Even the reward that one receives for the performance of a *mitzvah* is a demonstration of G-d’s kindness. This is because everything that one utilizes when one engages in the performance of a *mitzvah* is provided by G-d. One’s strength, ability, physicality, and environment are all G-d’s contribution.

Therefore the initiative that one takes to perform a *mitzvah*, which is an expression of one’s choice, is relatively infinitesimal compared to everything that is provided to him by G-d in order to perform the *mitzvah*. Therefore, the reward that one receives from performing *mitzvos* is also a manifestation of G-d’s unlimited Kindness.

There is a positive commandment to lend money to a Jew who is in need of it. If G-d provides all aspects of one’s physicality and material possessions and dictates that one should lend money to his fellow, why should one be concerned about taking collateral from a widow or orphan who are in a precarious financial state?

Although when one performs a *mitzvah* it may lead to financial loss, nevertheless whatever one possesses is only an outgrowth of G-d’s Kindness as was demonstrated by the redemption of the Jewish people from Egypt despite their unworthiness.

Chofetz Chaim: Often there are disputes among family members regarding the dividing of inheritance; it usually causes intense negative feelings within the family. It is usually due to the fact that each member wants more than what is rightfully his. The inappropriateness of this scenario can be explained with an allegory.

A king gave a gift to his children to be divided among themselves. His children began to quarrel regarding each of their portions. One of the sons, realizing the pain that was being caused to their father due to their bickering, chose to walk away and relinquish his rightful share. He said, “I prefer to forfeit my share than to bring pain upon my father.” Seeing this, the king transferred to that son multiples of what initially was intended to be his. The king said, “Because you were sensitive to my pain and understood that the material gain is not worthwhile under any circumstance to cause me pain, you chose to relinquish your interest and take a financial loss. Therefore you will be compensated handsomely and be special in my eyes.”

It is the same regarding the quarreling among Jews for whatever reason. G-d is pained to see His children quarreling. If one is willing to forfeit his portion for the sake of peace, rather than bringing pain to G-d, He will ultimately endow him with multiple times of what he was initially going to receive.

It was an impossibility for the Jewish people to escape from Egypt. It was not until *Moshe* was sent by G-d as the redeemer to bring the ten plagues upon Egypt that the Jewish people saw and understood that what was considered to be impossible could be changed because G-d is the Omnipotent One. They also realized that although they were unworthy, G-d Willed their redemption due to His infinite Kindness.

Therefore, when a Jew performs a *mitzvah*, even if he may have financial loss, he should do it without hesitation because everything that he possesses is only due to G-d’s Kindness. He should remember what G-d had done for him and the Jewish people when He took them out of Egypt.

The Jew should not mistreat the convert or the downtrodden due to his predicament because one must display kindness upon him as G-d displayed His Kindness at the time of the redemption from Egypt upon the Jewish people despite their unworthiness.



Yad Avraham Institute