

The Vindicating Power Of One's Physicality

YadAvNow.com Weekly Video Series: Ki Savo

Rabbi Yosef Kalatsky

The Root of Bikurim: An Expression of Thanks

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Receiving Credit for a Mitzvah

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Mitzvah of Bikurim

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Focus & Reflection

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Spiritual Rehabilitation Needs Verbal Confession

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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

Appreciating the Set-Backs in Life

Torah: When one brings the first fruits (*bekurim*) to the *Kohen* in the Temple, one must declare, “An Aramean tried to destroy my forefather... The Egyptians mistreated us and afflicted us... then we cried out to *Hashem*... *Hashem* heard our voice... and took us out of Egypt with a strong hand and with an outstretched arm, with great awesomeness, and with signs and wonders...” By making the declaration of the first fruits, one expresses his indebtedness to G-d for all that He had done for him.

G-d could have redeemed the Jewish people and taken them out of Egypt without miracles, signs, and wonders. He could have simply vanquished the Egyptians and taken the Jewish people to the Promised Land. Nevertheless, He chose to redeem them with “a strong hand and with an outstretched arm, with great awesomeness.” In addition, one must also specifically acknowledge and thank G-d for redeeming the Jewish people with revealed miracles. What is the value of such a manner of redemption? Why is this an aspect of the declaration that one must express?

The Jewish people in Egypt were subjected to the most difficult bondage for a reason. It was to cause them to cry out to G-d for His salvation. Although they were pagans,

they did not cry out to any other god. The entire context of Egypt, being deprived and afflicted, was necessary for the Jew to come to the realization that he must turn to G-d. Thus, the affliction had infinite value because it was the catalyst for the Jew to ascend and achieve his spiritual potential. Since the Jewish people’s response to their difficult situation was crying out to G-d, He responded by taking them out of Egypt with great miracles.

G-d chose to redeem the Jewish people with revealed miracles because it was necessary for their spiritual development to witness such a level of revelation. Without the revealed miracles of Egypt, the Jewish people would not have been able to be extricated from their idolatrous ways to become the chosen people at Sinai. One must thank G-d not only for the revealed miracles that He performed for us, but also for the difficult setting in which we were placed. It was within the context of the bondage of Egypt that the Jew was able to make the proper choice to pray to G-d and merit the awesome miracles of the Exodus, which ultimately led to the receiving of the *Torah* at Sinai.

There is a positive commandment to remember the miraculous redemption from Egypt every day. The verse states regarding this commandment, “...all the days of your life.”

Gemara in Tractate *Berachos*: There is a discussion whether one would be obligated to remember the redemption from Egypt during the era of *Moshiach*, which will bring revealed miracles that would vastly surpass those of the Exodus. The *Gemara* concludes that although the miracles of the Messianic era will overshadow those of the redemption of Egypt, the Jew must still recount the wonders of the Exodus. Why is this so?

The precursor to the coming of *Moshiach* is the “birth pangs of *Moshiach* (*chevlei Moshiach*).” *Reb Yochanan* remarked that the birth pangs of *Moshiach* would be so difficult that he did not want to be alive during this time. Why is it necessary for the Jewish people to experience the birth pangs of *Moshiach*? It is within the context of difficulty that the Jewish people will be given the opportunity to make the proper choice, as they had done in Egypt. If G-d subjects them to tragedy and despite the seeming hopelessness of their situation, they turn to Him, then they will merit the most awesome level of revelation, which is the coming of *Moshiach*.

One must realize that there is no security apart from G-d Himself. Despite the comforts and security of where we live, the Jew is in a precarious state, which could turn to tragedy at any moment. Since we are in the month of *Elul*, a time in which G-d is closest to the Jewish people, we must understand and appreciate that it is only through His Divine Assistance that we are able to survive. It would be foolish to believe that one's success and security is due to his own initiative and ability. We should not regard our difficult situation with despair, rather we should take it as the ultimate opportunity to advance our spirituality as the Jewish people had done in Egypt.

The Essence of Teshuvah

Rambam in *Hilchos Teshuvah* (*Laws of Repentance*): “*Teshuvah* (repentance) is special/unique because it brings one close to the *Shechina* (Divine Presence). As it states in the verse, ‘Return Israel to *Hashem*, your G-d.’... If one does *Teshuvah*, he will be able to attach himself to G-d. *Teshuvah* brings those who are distant, close to G-d. As recently as yesterday one was despised by G-d. He was considered detestable, distant, and an abomination.

“However, today after he does *Teshuvah* he is considered by G-d as beloved, precious, and close... How many benefits are there in *Teshuvah*! As it states, ‘Your sins separate you from your G-d.’ When one cries out G-d, He does not respond. As it states, ‘(As a sinner) when he

does *mitzvos* G-d rejects them...G-d says, ‘Who is asking you to trample My courtyard?’ However after the sinner repents is states, ‘You are attached to G-d... when you cry out He will respond immediately.’”

Rambam contrasts one being distant from G-d when he is in a state of sin and being close (*Karov*) to the Divine Presence after doing *Teshuvah*. The consequence of repentance is closeness to G-d (*Karov*). When one is *Karov*, G-d views him as beloved and precious. It is interesting to note that we recite in the *Ashrei*, “G-d is close to all those who call upon Him sincerely (in truth).” One who is true, does not call upon another only in times of need. A true friend is continuously interested in the welfare of his fellow.

When one calls out to G-d, if he at that moment appreciates and values who He is, he is considered to be calling out to G-d “in truth” and is thus *Karov*. If one understands and appreciates G-d he will do *Teshuvah* and be close to Him. When Nadav and Avihu were struck down, G-d had said, “I will sanctify Myself through those who are closest to Me...” Indicating the special status of one who is “*Karov* (close).”

It is interesting to note that on *Rosh Hashanah*, although it is the Day of Judgment, we do not do *Teshuvah*. The prosecutor (*satan*) prosecutes the Jewish people unrelentingly, yet we do not repent. Rather we focus on the glory of G-d and coronate Him as our King. We pray for the elimination of *chilul Hashem* (desecration of G-d's Name) and the unification of the Jewish people. One would think that at this time of intense prosecution, we should acknowledge our sins and repent. We do not do *Teshuvah* on the Day of Judgment because our declaration and acceptance of G-d as our King is an expression of closeness. Acknowledging and recognizing G-d and focusing only on His glory brings about the same closeness as *Teshuvah*.

When *Avraham* had been informed that his nephew *Lot* was taken captive he immediately went forth to do battle with the Four Mighty kings. Although he understood that he would need great miracles to be victorious he did not hesitate in his rescue of *Lot*. It was only after he had saved his nephew that *Avraham* was concerned that he had perhaps depleted his merits since G-d had performed many miracles on his behalf. Why did *Avraham* not have this concern prior to embarking on his mission? It was because *Avraham's* love and concern for his nephew superseded any concern for himself.

Similarly on *Rosh Hashanah* our love and reverence for G-d and His Glory is primary. We do not focus on ourselves or our need to repent in any way – thus, making our existence secondary to the Glory of G-d. This generates the highest level of love and closeness between G-d and the Jewish people – similar to that of doing *Teshuvah*. Once one is *Karov*, his repentance/prayers/requests will be heard by G-d. Thus, the prosecution is silenced.

We refer to G-d as “Avinu (our Father) Malkeinu (our King).” The relationship between child and parent is naturally close and intimate. A child need not be concerned about his shortcomings because the parent understands that although he is not perfect, he is nevertheless loved by the parent because of the relationship. However, a subject must be concerned about his degree of adherence to the will of the king because of his obligation to serve him. Thus, if he were to fail, he would be culpable. This is not so regarding the relationship of child and parent because of the nature of the relationship.

Chofetz Chaim citing *Pirkei D'Rebe Lazar*: It is easier to do *Teshuvah* during the period of time from the beginning of the month of *Elul* through *Yom Kippur*. These days are identified as “the days of mercy.” Even if one’s *Teshuvah* is not perfect, G-d is willing to accept it during this time because there is a special closeness between Him and the Jewish people.

The prophet regarding the ten days between *Rosh Hashanah* and *Yom Kippur*: “Seek out G-d when He is close.” On *Rosh Hashanah*, G-d is coronated as our King and on *Yom Kippur* we refer to Him as our Father, which is the ultimate in closeness—that of a parent to a child.

Living Responsibly Rather Than Reflexively

Torah: “Remember what *Amalek* did to you...that he happened (*karcha*) upon you on the way...”

Rashi citing *Chazal*: The term *karcha* – “The nations of the world were in awe of the Jewish people and were afraid to engage them in battle after witnessing the miracles of Egypt and the splitting of the Sea. However, *Amalek* was not afraid and attacked them without hesitation. By attacking the Jewish people, *Amalek* demonstrated to the world that there was no basis to fear the Jewish people. They dispelled the image that the Jew is unapproachable and invincible.

“It is analogous to a scolding bath that everyone is afraid to approach. A person came and jumped into the hot

bath and was scolded. Although he was burned, he cooled the bath for the others to enter. Identically, when *Amalek* attacked the Jewish people, although they were defeated, they diminished and undermined the world’s perception of the Jewish people.” One would think that the one who jumped into the scolding hot bath should be regarded as an unstable fool. However *Chazal* do not use this term. They refer to him as, “*ben bliyal*.”

Gemara: “*Bliyal*” is one who is “*bli oel* – without a yoke.” This individual does not have the yoke of heaven. Thus, he does not have any conscience. Why should having a conscience be a deterrent to jumping into the scolding bath?

Gemara in Tractate *Bava Kama*: One is not permitted to mutilate himself. It is because one is endowed with his physicality by G-d. One does not have the right to destroy that which was given to him by the Creator. One who has a yoke, understands that he has a Master. He is obliged to conduct himself in conformity with the will of the Master. However, if one does not have a yoke, he is not bound to anything other than his own interests and desires. This individual will act reflexively without conscience in order to achieve what he believes to be in his interest – regardless of the consequences. This is *Amalek*. As the verse states, “They (*Amalek*) do not fear G-d.”

A Jew has consciences because he believes that there is a system of reward and punishment for one’s behavior/actions. One who lives with accountability does not act reflexively because he understands that there are consequences (positive or negative). On *Rosh Hashanah* we coronate G-d as our King and accept His yoke. The Jew is bound to the will of the King. Because the Jew carries this yoke, he reflects on his actions and behaves in a deliberate manner with a full appreciation of the consequences. Thus, the Jew is able to maximize on the benefits of life because he does not act reflexively as an individual who has no conscience.

The Linkage Between Torah and Material Blessing

Torah: “It shall be that if you hearken to the voice of *Hashem*, your G-d, to observe, to perform all of His commandments that I command you this day, then *Hashem* your G-d, will make you supreme over all the nations of the earth. All these blessings will come upon you and overtake you, if you hearken to the voice of *Hashem*, your G-d.”

Sforno: If one hearkens to the Word of G-d, blessing will come upon him even if he does not take the initiative to seek out the blessing. This is because if one focuses his efforts on fulfilling G-d's Will, then his *Torah* is primary and his livelihood is secondary. If one's material pursuits are only an incidental and only a means, then blessing will come upon him. However if one's primary focus is the material then one must take the initiative to seek it out.

There is a classification of person that is applied to unique individuals – *Torason u'mnason* – the *Torah* is his vocation. This is an appellation that applies to individuals whose commitment to *Torah* goes beyond making it his primary pursuit and his livelihood secondary. The one whose "*Torah* is his vocation" does not interrupt his *Torah* study for any reason and does not allow his time to be utilized for any other pursuit. However, one does not need to be at this level in order to be the beneficiary of G-d's blessing.

One only needs to make *Torah* his primary focus and blessing will come upon him. If one's material pursuits are only a means to a spiritual end, then G-d will provide because He wants one to be focused on fulfilling His Will rather than on the means itself. If one's primary focus is on the means (the material) and not on the ultimate spiritual end, then he must devote himself to the pursuit of a livelihood.

Torah: *Avraham*, our Patriarch, interrupted his conversation with G-d in order to provide hospitality to the three wayfarers (angels).

Gemara: "From here we learn that providing hospitality is greater than accepting the Divine Presence." If *Avraham* was engaged with the Divine Presence, which is the ultimate, how could he interrupt this to provide hospitality to three wayfarers who he had suspected to be idolaters? We can understand this with an analogy. If the president of a company summons an employee for a meeting but he refuses to come because he is attending to one of the company's largest clients, the president would assuredly postpone the meeting without hesitation. This is because the employee is fully engaged in accomplishing the goals of the company and the will of the president.

The objective of *Avraham's* hospitality was only to act as a vehicle to espouse monotheism. It is understandable that he should interrupt his conversation with G-d in order to accomplish His Will. If the purpose of the Jew in existence is to fulfill the *Torah*, then it is logical and

obvious that G-d does not want him to be engaged in anything that would be a distraction from that purpose. Therefore G-d provides blessing to the individual (without the need for initiative) if his focus is on fulfilling His Will.

Torah: When G-d created *Adam*, He created for him a helpmate, *Chava*.

Chazal: The purpose of the helpmate, was so that *Adam* should not be distracted from engaging in *Torah* and *mitzvos*. *Chava* was to provide for all of *Adam's* material needs so that he could pursue his spiritual objective in existence. We see from the onset existence that creation was designed with the intent that the Jew should be able to focus completely on *Torah* and *mitzvos*. Thus, blessing would then come upon him without any initiative.

One's Level of Enthusiasm Reflects One's Level of Commitment

Torah in the *tochacha* (curses): "But it will be that if you do not hearken to the voice of *Hashem*, your G-d, to observe all His commandments and all His decrees that I command you today, then all these curses will come upon you and overtake you...Because you did not serve *Hashem*, your G-d with joy (*simcha*) and wholeheartedness..." The verse seems to be self-contradictory. It states that all the curses will come upon the Jewish people if they do not heed the Word of G-d; however, later it states that the curses will come upon them although they may have performed all the *mitzvos* without joy.

It is clear that the *Torah* is telling us that unless one regards the *mitzvos* as a privilege, then one will not perform them with joy and wholeheartedness. If one experiences the *Torah* as a burden, then ultimately he will not perform the *mitzvos* at all. The curses came upon the Jewish people because they did not serve G-d with joy, despite the fact that He provided for their every need. When they had entered the Land of Israel, they did not have any material concerns or distraction, yet the Jewish people did not serve G-d with joy. Evidently, they did not appreciate or internalize the privilege of being G-d's Chosen People.

Every day in our prayers we recite many things that identify us as the G-d's people. We say how privileged we are to be His Chosen People and have a share in His *Torah*. Yet, do we behave in a manner consistent with all of the declarations we make? Are we truly committed

to G-d? Do we truly feel fortunate to “sit in the House of G-d?” If one does not serve G-d with love, he will regard the *mitzvos* as a burden and ultimately will stray from the path of *Torah*.

Yesod V'Shoresh Havodah: When he would hear that a Jewish child was born he would be overcome with tremendous joy because there would be another soldier born into the army of G-d. From the beginning of the month of *Elul* until *Yom Kippur*, G-d is closer to the Jewish people than He is the entire year. He values and loves the Jew at this time in a special and unique way, which is the ultimate. We should take the opportunity to reflect on the privilege of being Chosen as His people and being given His *Torah* to fulfill with joy and wholeheartedness.

The Confession of the Tithes

Torah: “When you have finished tithing every tithe of your produce in the third year, the year of the tithe, you shall give to the Levite, to the proselyte, to the orphan, and to the widow...then you shall say before *Hashem*, your G-d, ‘I have removed the holy things from the house...according to whatever commandment You commanded me; I have not transgressed any of your commandments...’ After one had given all of the prescribed tithes he is to recite the “*vidoy maaser* – confession of the tithes.” If one had sinned he is obligated to confess as part of the *Teshuvah* process.

Rambam in *The Laws of Repentance*: If one does not make a verbal confession, he will not be atoned. What is the nature of the confession of the tithes? The one who recites the “*vidoy maaser*” may not have actually sinned.

Sforno: The confession of the tithes to mean, “As a result of our sins and the sins of our forefathers the service was taken from the firstborn. (Because of their participation in the sin of the Golden Calf, the firstborn forfeited their status as being the officiants of G-d to the Levites/*Kohanim*). In truth the firstborn should have been the recipient of the tithes. The firstborn was sanctified by G-d in Egypt; however, because of our sins the tithes are given to the *Levy* and *Kohen*...”

Since the Jewish people failed with the sin of the Golden Calf, the confession of the tithes is recited. The *Halacha* dictates that every day one must mourn the destruction of the Temple (feel the pain of not having the Service before the Divine Presence). However, regarding the firstborn forfeiting their special role as the officiants of G-d, one could say this unfortunate circumstance only came about because of historical events and is something of the past.

Since the *Torah* states that one must recite the confession of the tithes, it is an indication that even the service in the Temple, was not as it was originally intended to be. The firstborn was to be the Priest. He is truly the first/choicest of G-d since he opened the womb of the mother. However, because of the sins of the Jewish people he no longer functions in that capacity. Thus, the service in the Temple was diminished from its intended state.

Gemara in Tractate *Berachos*: A Heavenly Voice declares every day, “Woe is the Father who exiled His children from His Table. Woe to the children who have been exiled (thus causing pain to G-d).” G-d is pained continuously not only because the Temple was destroyed, but also because the service in the Temple was not what He intended it to be, with the firstborn acting as the officiants. Just as existence was diminished because Adam ate from the Tree of Knowledge, so too was existence diminished because the firstborn forfeited his special status. Although reciting the confession of the tithes alone will not correct the wrong that was done, it will make the Jewish people continuously cognizant of their predicament and cause them to reflect on what other issues could be corrected in their lives to bring about a reinstatement of the world to a more optimum level.



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