

*Yad Avraham Institute*  
Weekly Torah Commentaries Series

**Portion of Ki Savo**

September 3, 2015

**Presented By: Rabbi Yosef Kalatsky, Shlita**

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**About the Yad Avraham Institute**

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## Portion of Ki Savo

*Presented by*

**Rabbi Yosef Kalatsky, Shlita**

**Dean**

### ***1. One's Expression of Thankfulness***

The Torah states 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 (seven species of Israel) to the Temple and make a declaration. In this declaration, one gives thanks to G'd for all that He had done for him and the Jewish people since the time of their beginnings, the time Yaakov, our Patriarch. The declaration is an expression of the individual's gratitude to G'd.

The Torah tells us that the tribes of Reuvain and Gad had abundant livestock. They thus 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. The Midrash cites the position of Reb Yossi who states that the produce of the trans-Jordan side of Israel is not obligated in bikurim. He explains that this is because, “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. Factually, 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.

There is something unique regarding the mitzvah of bikurim that is not found in any other mitzvah. There is an obligation for one to demonstrate and declare his indebtedness to G'd, which is something that is unusual. 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.

The Midrash in the Portion of Mattos states, “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 thus 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 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 Tractate Makkos, , “In the path in which one choses 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 native 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.

## 2. Declaration, the Ultimate

The Torah states regarding the positive commandment of bikurim (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....”** 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 cites Sifrei who explains that when the Torah states, **“And you will say to him ...”** it means that the individual is declaring, “I am not an ingrate (*kafui tova*).”

The Torah tells us that 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 had 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. The Gemara in Tractate Avoda Zarah tells us that after the Jewish people complained about the Manna, G’d characterized the Jewish people by saying, “You are ingrates who descend from an ingrate.” The Gemara explains that this is referring to them as the decedents of Adam, who was the original ingrate of the human species.

The Torah tells us that 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 for Adam a wife 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, thus linking G’d with his own transgression. G’d thus classified him as an “ingrate (*kafui tovah*).”

The Gemara in Tractate Pesachim tells us that 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 (*muksa*). 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”. Thus, the meaning of “*kafui tovah*” 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. It is interesting that 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)." The Gemara in Tractate Yevamos explains that 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 of Adam had after he had sinned. But rather, they were at the level of Adam before the sin when he had the dimension of spiritual potential to perfect existence. Thus, through the declaration of the bikurim the Jew acknowledges that he recognizes the good and thus reflects the profile of the original Adam.

### ***3. The Spiritualization of the Individual***

The Torah tells us that 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 cites Chazal who explain, "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....**'" Rashi in the Portion of Bechukosai cites Chazal (Toras Kohanim) who explain that the verse, "**If you will follow My Statutes and observe My Commandments and perform them...**" is referring to the one who is toiling in Torah and is thus 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 Torah 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 cites Chazal who explain this to mean, "I have rejoiced and have caused others to rejoice." Meaning 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 had received something of value that they 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 thus justify his existence. Thus, 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. Thus, the Chazal that is cited by Rashi regarding the supplication that G'd should gaze down upon him and bless him because he had done all that had been decreed, is

the same individual who had toiled in Torah. He thus has a full appreciation to do the Will of G'd, the mitzvah.

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)..." the bounty will be unlimited.

#### **4. Maintaining the Viability of Torah**

The Torah states, "**(Moshe said to the Jewish people), This day (*ha'yom*), 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 cites Chazal, "Each day they (the mitzvos) should be new in your eyes as if you were commanded today (by G'd) to do them." Chazal explain in a number of other locations that "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 hears 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 will thus perform them begrudgingly. Thus, 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 thus 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, that is 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 tell us based on verses that at time of the giving of the Torah at Sinai, the Jewish people stood with "awe and trepidation." They had at that time 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.

The Gemara in a number of locations states, "I (G'd) have created the evil inclination and the Torah as its antidote." Meaning, 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. The Gemara tells us that 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. Thus, the Torah must have the same level of vitality and viability as the evil inclination, which renews itself every day.

The Torah states, "**If you will continuously hearken to My commandments (*im shemoa tishma*)..."** The Gemara explains the verse to mean, "If you leaned the old (listened) then you will listen to the new." Meaning, 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 said that 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.

## 5. Remembering G'd's Kindness

The Torah states, **“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 explains, “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.” Based on Rashi's understanding, 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 points out, “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.” Meaning, just as the Jewish people were strangers in Egypt and G'd redeemed them, so too they should not mistreat the convert/stranger.

Chazal tell us that 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 writes that 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 Yebanei),” so too the redemption came about due to G'd's attribute of Kindness.

The Gemara in Tractate Nidah states, “Everything is predestined by heaven, except for the fear of heaven.” Meaning, 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.

The Torah tells us that 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 writes that often when 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. He explains the inappropriateness of this scenario 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 says, “I prefer to forfeit my share than to bring pain upon my father.” Seeing this, the king transfers to that son multiples of what initially was intended to be his. The king says, “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.” Chofetz Chaim writes that 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 that 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.