



The Vindicating Power Of One's Physicality

YadAvNow.com Weekly Video Series: Ki Savo

Rabbi Yosef Kalatsky

Weekly Video: The Vindicating Power Of One's Physicality

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Reflective of His Profile is Innately Holy

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Begrudging of His Kindness, Blessing is Terminated

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Weathering the Tempest Thru Single Mindedness

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1. An Ashkanazic custom is to say Psalm 27 twice daily in Elul through Shimini Atzeres.
2. King David: Throughout his lifetime he only had one yearning to dwell in the House of G-d all the days of his life.
3. Chofetz Chaim: Throughout all stages of his life, King David had only one yearning- to dwell in the House of G-d.
4. This yearning persisted throughout his lifetime- whether he was a shepherd, the son-in-law of the king who slew Goliath, a fugitive, or the greatest king ever to be.
5. When one has this single minded perspective, one blesses Hashem for the Good and the Bad.
6. Moshe says to the Jews: What is G-d asking of you?
7. Chofetz Chaim: Every moment we make continuous choices believing that the choice is appropriate.
8. One must ask himself, "Is this truly what G-d is asking of you?"
9. When confronted with this question, one has a greater chance of making the right choice.
10. A safety mechanism suggested by Chazal: Choose for yourself a teacher and acquire for yourself a friend.

Weekly Torah Commentary Series: Ki Savo



The Vindicating Power Of One's Physicality

The Challenge of Acknowledging One's Benefactor

Torah 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....and you shall put it in a basket and go to the place that *Hashem*, your G-d will choose..." One must bring the first of his produce to the Temple and make a declaration, "...An Aramean tried to destroy my forefather, He descended to Egypt and sojourned there...*Hashem* heard our voice... *Hashem* took us out..." In this declaration, one gives thanks to G-d for all that He had done for the Jewish people since the time of *Yaakov*, our Patriarch.

Midrash: The *mitzvah* of the first fruits only applies to the Land that "G-d gives to you" to excludes the trans-Jordan side, that the Jewish people had taken on their own. Although the trans-Jordan side of the Land is considered to be part of the Land of Israel; however,

since the tribes of *Reuvain* and *Gad* took the initiative to request the land because they needed grazing land for their livestock, it is considered a location that was not given by G-d. If the trans-Jordan side is considered to be part of the Land of Israel, why should its produce be exempt from the *mitzvah* of *bikurim*?

When one brings the *bikurim* (new fruits) to the Sanctuary to declare his thanks, one says to the *Kohen* that he is not an ingrate. By bringing the first fruits and making the verbal declaration, one expresses his gratitude for all that G-d had done for the Jewish people. The declaration of *bikurim* is the only instance where the *Torah* obligates one to express his thanks to G-d. Why is it limited to this particular *mitzvah*?

When one expresses his gratitude to another, he is acknowledging that he is indebted to his benefactor for the good that he had received from him. To be able to acknowledge that one is a beneficiary is not a simple task.

King Solomon in Proverbs regarding one who borrows money: "The man who is the borrower is a slave to the lender." The indebtedness is the equivalent of being bound. When one acknowledges G-d and gives thanks to Him, he is declaring that everything that he has is only due to G-d's Kindness. Thus, one is bound to G-d as a debtor.

Very often, one evades expressing gratitude to his benefactor he does not want to become a debtor. He thus perceives the good in his life in another way. He sees the good as not done for the sake of the beneficiary but rather it was done for the sake of the benefactor. If one believes that he is free from debt, then he feels that he is not obligated to any benefactor. The Land of Israel was gifted to the Jewish people by G-d and is unrelated to their initiative. Thus, the Torah obligates the Jew to express his indebtedness through the bringing of the new fruits. However, since the trans-Jordan side was gifted to the Jewish people as a result of the initiative of the tribes, the obviousness of G-d's Goodness is slightly occluded.

Rambam in the Laws of Prayer: The format of the *Amidah* (silent prayer) is divided into three parts. The opening blessings must acknowledge Who G-d is. The center blessings are personal requests and the closing blessings are giving thanks to G-d. If one omits any segment of this format, one does not fulfill his *Torah* obligation of prayer. Although one may acknowledge G-d and supplicate Him for his needs, if one does not express his gratitude, then he did not fulfill his obligation. One must express his indebtedness to G-d through the declaration of thanks. Just as the *mitzvah* of *bikurim* obligates one to acknowledge that he is a beneficiary of G-d's Kindness, so too is the closing segment of the *Amidah* and expression of one's understanding that G-d is the sole Benefactor.

Gemara in Tractate *Berachos*: *Avraham*, our Patriarch was the first human being to declare G-d as "the Master (*Adni*)."
Although *Adam* also acknowledged G-d as the Master, it was because he was the handiwork of G-d Himself. However, *Avraham* who was born into a pagan world, came to this understanding through his own initiative. He was the only one to come to this level of understanding and thus he was recognized by G-d as "My servant *Avraham*."

The Ongoing Struggle of Life

Torah: "Today, *Hashem*, your G-d is commanding you to do these statutes and ordinances. You shall retain them and perform them with all your heart and all your soul..." What is the meaning of "with all your soul?"

We recite in the *Shema*, "You should love *Hashem*, your G-d with all your heart and with all your soul..."

Chazal: "With all your soul" means "one should love G-d to such a degree that one must be willing to give his life for Him." When one gives his life for G-d it is a one time decision because his life has ended.

Sforno: One is able to fulfill this *mitzvah* on a continuous basis. Whenever one suppresses his natural inclinations and desires for the physical, for the sake of G-d he is in essence suppressing his animal life source. Thus, when one sacrifices in this context for the sake of G-d in order to maintain and advance his spiritual soul, it is the equivalent of sacrificing one's soul for G-d. Therefore, one should serve and love G-d to such a degree that one is willing to compromise the material.

One could compromise on his physical desires by suppressing them because he understands them to be wrong and contrary to the Will of G-d.

Sforno: One could deny his desires for an even more advanced reason. It is when one understands the dimension of the One who has commanded him. If one appreciates and internalizes the fact the Omnipotent G-d, Who controls and maintains all existence has commanded him to do something, he will be drawn to fulfill His Will not because he has suppressed his inclination but rather he is motivated by his appreciation of the great opportunity and value of fulfilling G-d's Will. One's inclinations for the material will be naturally negated to something of greater value. One will have no difficulty in fulfilling G-d's Will if one truly appreciate who He is.

Chofetz Chaim: One could refrain from speaking *lashon hara* (evil speech) either because he understands the consequences of expressing oneself in a manner contrary to the *Torah*, or because he sees his fellow Jew in a positive light because of his love for him. If one does not speak *lashon hara* because he understands that it is wrong and thus there is a continuous suppression of his inclination to not speak negatively, he will ultimately fail.

However if in addition to the understanding that speaking *lashon hara* is contrary to the Will of G-d he loves his fellow Jew, he will refrain speaking negatively about him because he has no desire or interest to speak about someone who he sees in a positive light.

Reb Meir Simcha z'tl: Regarding giving one's life for G-d, although it is the ultimate sacrifice, once it is done there is nothing beyond that point. However, if one must battle his evil inclination on a continuous basis it is something more difficult. Thus, the ongoing sacrifice to suppress one's inclination to do the Will of G-d has a greater level of accomplishment than giving one's life, which is a one time event.

The Ramification of Entering into the Covenant

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

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

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

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

Sfrono: "The *Torah* states that G-d is presenting the Jewish people two extremes. The blessing in the

positive and the curse in the negative. The way of the Jew will not be as one who is in the middle (*beinoni*), as is the way of the world. Thus, G-d only presents the two ultimate extremes because these are the only options available for to the Jew. If one is worthy of blessing, he will receive great bounty that is outside the realm of nature. If one sins, he will have a curse that will come upon him which will cause him to be diminished to such a degree that even achieving what is minimal will be difficult. There is no interim state for the Jew." A Jew has a continuous obligation to be engaged in performing the Will of G-d. If he is not, it is not considered that he is in a neutral position but rather he is not adhering to G-d's objective for him. The objective of the Jew to continuously bring Glory to Him.

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

Awakening and Activating One's Spirituality

Torah: In the fourth year of the Sabbatical Cycle, before the Passover Festival, one must make the confession of the Tithes.

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

However, *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; then I will provide for your rains in their time..." is referring to the one who is deserving of blessing because he toils in *Torah*. How do we reconcile the two statements of *Chazal*? Is the verse, "If you will follow My Statutes..." referring to the distribution of tithes or is it referring to one toiling in *Torah*?

The individual who supplicates G-d predicates his request for blessing, "I have done all that you have commanded me...." *Rashi* cites *Chazal* who explain this to mean, "I have rejoiced and have caused others to rejoice." Meaning the individual who is distributing the tithes and bringing the *bikurim* rejoiced when he distributed the tithes and the recipients rejoiced (those who received their rightful portion of grain and produce). It is understandable that the one who receives the tithes would rejoice, because he had received something of value.

However, how could the one who distributes a significant portion of his harvest experience joy when he has minimized his profits? It is only the individual who is sufficiently spiritualized who can appreciate and internalize the innate value of a *mitzvah*. One who has a sense of his spirituality and understands that only through the *mitzvah* can he advance and thus address the purpose of his existence will rejoice. The only way one can achieve a sense of spirituality is through the toil of *Torah*. Because the individual becomes spiritualized through this process he has the capacity to appreciate the value of a *mitzvah*.

Although the individual is foregoing significant percentage of his material accomplishment by giving the tithes and *bikurim*; nevertheless, because of the value of the *mitzvah* of distributing the tithes to the rightful individuals result will bring him joy. This is because he appreciates that the result outweighs the material cost factor. 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 when performing these particular *mitzvos*.

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 in fact diligent in their observance of the *mitzvos*; however, they did not serve G-d with joy. It is obvious that the reason they did not serve G-d with joy is because they did not toil sufficiently in *Torah*. They performed the *mitzvos* purely as an obligation and not as a privilege.

Why should these people who observed the *Torah* meticulously 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 one would have a sufficient level of appreciation for what G-d had provided him, he would be motivated to eagerly reciprocate with joy to serve G-d the Master. He would see the *mitzvah* as an opportunity and a privilege to do the Will of G-d.

We say every morning in the morning prayers, "How fortunate are we because of our portion and because of our lot." We also recite the Psalm (*ashrei*), "Fortunate is the one who dwells in Your House." If one does not truly toil in *Torah* and is dedicated to its study, although intellectually he sincerely believes what he says in his prayers, he does not sense the reality of that "good fortune."

However, if one does not sense it and declares these various statements it is tinged with dishonesty. The only way that can have a sense of privilege is through a sincere and significant involvement in the study of *Torah*. If this should take place, one will have the capacity to experience the joy of serving G-d and being a member of the Jewish people.

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."

Torah: "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.



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