



# The Vindicating Power Of One's Physicality

## YadAvNow.com Weekly Video Series: Ki Savo

Rabbi Yosef Kalatsky

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### Reciprocation When a Beneficiary of Kindness

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### Tithing Obligations

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### Torah: Energy Activating the Forces Allowing the World to Exist

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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

#### The Uniqueness of the Jew

*Torah*: “You shall take the first fruit (*Bikkurim*) of the ground that you bring in from your Land that *Hashem*, your G-d, gives you, and you shall put it in a basket and go to the place that *Hashem*, your G-d, will choose to make His Name rest there.” The verse is referring to the *mitzvah* of *Bikkurim*, from the same word as *Bechorim* (first born). This is the Positive Commandment to bring for *Hashem* the first of the newly ripened fruits of one’s crop from the Land of Israel to the Temple Mount. There, it is given to the *Kohen* who is the only one qualified to partake of these holy fruits. At the time of this ceremony, the donor must declare his gratitude to *Hashem* for the land that produced them. Subsequently, he prostrates himself to indicate his subservience to *Hashem* and his recognition of Him.

*Rabbeinu Bachya* in his introduction to *Ki Savo*: The concept of *Reishis* (first) which is central to the ritual of *Bikkurim* can be elucidated and expanded on as follows. The Jewish people themselves are referred to

as *Reishis* (first) – “The Jews are holy to *Hashem* as they are the equivalent of the first tithing of the wheat (*Reishis Tevuasa*).” As the Chosen People (*Reishis*), they must acknowledge the existence of *Hashem*, (*Reishis*), the one from whom all existence emanates. The manner of acknowledging *Hashem* is through the ritual of bringing the *Bikkurim* (first ripened fruits) to the Temple Mount, the location that is *Reishis* since it is the spot from which all existence began. The *Bikkurim* are given to the *Kohen* who is also *Reishis* since he comes from the special tribe chosen for the service of *Hashem*.

*Rabbeinu Bachya* is saying that there is a single thread which weaves through the entire *Bikkurim* ritual that reflects the characteristic of *Reishis*. The *Torah* is revealing to us that anything which reflects the characteristic of *Reishis* has an innate holiness and special status because it mirrors that characteristic of *Hashem* - who is the beginning of everything. The reason for this is that anything that shares a common characteristic with *Hashem* can be associated with

Him and the basis for all relationships is commonality. The *Bechor* (the First Born) innately shares the trait of being the first, since he is the child that opened his mother's womb – '*Kadosh Me'Rechem*' – this makes him holy.

Initially the *Bechorim* were the ones meant to be the *Kohanim* (priests), designated to officiate in the Temple. However, since they were involved with the *Chet HaAigel* (Sin of the Golden Calf) they became tainted and no longer qualified for this position. However, the Tribe of *Levy* did not participate in the *Chet HaAigel* and the *Kohanim*, the most special of the Tribe of *Levy*, assumed the status of *Reishis* (unique and one of kind) and thus qualified to be the officiants of *Hashem*.

*Midrash*: The letters of the word "*B'Hebarom*" meaning "And He (*Hashem*) created them (existence)" are the same letters that are contained in the name *Avraham*. This indicates that *Avraham* is the beginning of a new existence within creation.

*Gemara* in Tractate *Berachos*: *Adam* was the first human being to refer to *Hashem* as "Master" (*Adni*). The commentators point out that this was only because he was the handiwork of G-d and therefore he recognized Him as the Master. *Avraham* on the other hand was born into a pagan world, where G-d's existence was unknown to mankind. Despite that, he was able to recognize that G-d is the Master.

According to this understanding *Avraham* possessed the characteristic of *Reishis* – being the first to recognize *Hashem* through his own understanding. Therefore, *Hashem* refers to *Avraham* as, "My beloved" because they shared this commonality. As a result, we see that because of *Avraham* the Jewish people have a special relationship with *Hashem*; this is why we share a commonality with Him, unlike any other nation. There is a Positive Commandment to "Cleave to *Hashem* – *Bo Sidbuk*."

*Gemara*: How could one cleave to *Hashem*, who is fire? It answers that a person who marries his daughter to a *Talmid Chacham* or gives his possessions to him cleaves to *Hashem* through him. The reason why a *Talmid Chacham* is considered special is because of the wisdom that he possesses, which is the *Torah* itself, the Wisdom of *Hashem* – *Reishis*. The more we perfect and value our uniqueness as Jews, the Chosen People of *Hashem*, the more we will have relevance to *Hashem* – the ultimate *Reishis*.

## The Value of Focus

*Torah*: When one brings the newly ripened fruits (*Bikkurim*) he must make a declaration and say, "An Aramean tried to destroy my forefather. He descended to Egypt and sojourned there, few in number, and there became a great nation – great, strong, and numerous. The Egyptians mistreated us and afflicted us, and placed hard work upon us. Then we cried out to *Hashem*, the G-d of our forefathers, and *Hashem* heard our voice and saw our affliction, our travail, and our oppression.

*Hashem* took us out of Egypt with a strong hand and with an outstretched arm, with great awesomeness, and with signs and with wonders. He brought us to this place, and gave us this Land, a Land flowing with milk and honey. And now, behold! I have brought the first fruits of the ground that You have given me, O *Hashem*!" After making this declaration, the one who brought the new fruit prostrates himself before *Hashem* as a sign of self-negation in the presence of *Hashem*.

*Rashi* citing *Chazal*: The person who brings the *Bikkurim* indicates that he is not an "ingrate" because he acknowledges that the source of all his blessing is *Hashem*. It is interesting to note that the obligation of tithing the dough (*Challah*), grains and produce (*Terumah*), and other tithes, were implemented immediately upon entry into the Land. However, the *mitzvah* of *Bikkurim* only became an obligation after the Land was conquered and divided – when the Jewish people were "settled in the Land." If one is obligated to show his appreciation to *Hashem* through the bringing of the *Bikkurim* and acknowledge the cause of his blessing, then why did this obligation only come about when the Jews were "settled in the Land?"

The explanation is that in order for a person to be able to focus on and internalize the value of being a beneficiary of *Hashem's* Blessing, one needs an environment without distraction. When one is personally settled, he has the clarity of mind to internalize that the source of all blessing is *Hashem*. Therefore the *Torah* only obligated the Jews to bring *Bikkurim* after they were "settled in the Land" because it was only then that they were free of distractions.

One of the blessings of the *Amidah* (Silent Prayer) is the prayer for the restoration of justice: "Restore our judges as in the earliest times and our counselors as at

first; remove from us sorrow and groan; and reign over us –You *Hashem*, alone...”

*Rabbeinu Bachya on Bereishis*: What relevance does removing us from sorrow and groan have to restoring justice? If one is consumed with his own sorrow and pain, he will not be able to appreciate the advice of the judges and counselors. These feelings would also interfere with one’s capacity to appreciate the value of *Hashem*’s supreme reign. Therefore we ask *Hashem* to remove them in order to be able to fully benefit from the restoration of justice.

*Rambam in Hilchos Deos (The Laws of Conduct)*: “One should have in mind that his body should be complete and strong in order to dedicate himself to the service of *Hashem*. For it is impossible to understand and contemplate wisdom if one is hungry or sick, or if any of his limbs are in pain.” *Rambam* explains that it is impossible for one to be able to understand or contemplate wisdom fully if one is distracted by any physical ailments. One must be free of health challenges in order to appreciate *Hashem* and His wisdom.

If we acknowledge *Hashem* as being the Master of the Universe and the benefactor of all existence, and that we are His beneficiaries, then why do we not feel beholden to *Hashem* for all that we continually receive from Him? The answer is that we are drawn away by the challenges and responsibilities of life. After *Adam* sinned by eating of the Tree of Knowledge, *Hashem* cursed him and all mankind, “Through suffering shall you eat of the ground...By the sweat of your brow shall you eat bread...”

Firstly, since man must take the initiative to be responsible for his own physical existence, one tends to believe that his level of success and existence is due partially to his own efforts. Additionally, once man was cursed – “by the sweat of his brow, he shall eat bread” – he became preoccupied because of the degree of effort which is needed, thus causing him to lose focus. Consequently he is not able to internalize the reality of *Hashem*’s blessing.

In order for one to be able to recognize and internalize the value of *Hashem*’s blessings, one needs to maintain a continuous level of clarity and focus. This is gained and reinforced by reciting the *Birchas HaMazon* (Grace after Meals) which identifies the source of our satiation, and by reciting the *Amidah* (Silent Prayer) three times a

day (morning, afternoon, and evening) which causes us to understand that we are truly in need. The blessings prior to eating give us a cognizance that whatever way we benefit from this existence is through the blessing of *Hashem*. By limiting the diversions in our daily lives we are able to focus and appreciate *Hashem*’s blessings.

## **Joy - An Integral Part of One’s Function**

*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 the blessings will pursue you and overtake you, if you hearken to the voice of *Hashem*, your G-d... But if you do not hearken to the voice of *Hashem*, your G-d, to observe, to perform all of His commandments and all of His statutes that I command you today, then all these curses will pursue you and overtake you.” If one adheres to the *Torah*, he will have endless blessings, but if he does not, then endless curses will pursue him and overtake him.

*Torah*: “All these curses will come upon you and pursue you and overtake you, until you are destroyed... because you did not serve *Hashem*, your G-d, with joy (*simcha*) and goodness in your heart, when everything was abundant.” This verse seems to contradict the earlier one. It states that the reason why the curses will pursue you and overtake you is because you did not serve *Hashem* with joy of heart when everything was abundant.

The previous verse stated that the reason why the curses will pursue you and overtake you is because you did not heed the Word of *Hashem* which is unrelated to one’s joy of heart. How do we reconcile the two? If one is experiencing abundance and blessing in life why does he not do everything within his power to acknowledge and serve *Hashem*? It seems that this is an indication that performing the *mitzvah* is not something that he wants to do but rather something he feels obligated to do. He is only fulfilling the *mitzvos* because *Hashem* is demanding it of him.

If one does not understand the value of doing the Will of *Hashem*, then he will not serve *Hashem* with joy in his heart. As a result of this burdensome feeling, it is just a question of time before he will become fatigued and disinterested in the *mitzvos*. In fact the basis for not heeding the Word of *Hashem* is only because he

did not serve *Hashem* with Joy when everything was abundant. If one feels privileged and appreciative for all that *Hashem* has given him, even if one would not be obligated, one would be motivated to bring pleasure to G-d.

We are currently in the month of *Elul*. It is cited by many of the commentators that the word "*Elul*" is an acronym for "*Ani L' Dodi V'Dodi Li*" – I am to my beloved as my beloved is to me. During this month *Hashem* is closer to the Jewish people than any other time of the year and it is easier to be more spiritually sensitive during this time period. "I am to my beloved," means that if one takes the initiative to become close to his beloved (*Hashem*), then *Hashem* will assist His beloved (the Jewish People) to become closer to Him. The word *Elul*, as an acronym, indicates that if we relate to *Hashem* as our beloved then He responds to our initiative in kind. However, if one sees the performance of *mitzvos* only as an obligation and not as a privilege (as one would feel when he serves his beloved), then *Hashem* does not respond.

Before we recite the *Amidah* (Silent Prayer) we recite a verse from *Tehillim* (*Psalms* – the Words of King *David*). We say, "*Hashem* open my lips and allow my mouth to utter Your praises." Why do we need to ask *Hashem* to give us the ability to speak, to utter His praises, when speech is a natural function of human being? The answer is that the words which one articulates are only considered praises of *Hashem* if one truly feels what he is saying. We ask *Hashem* to give us that sense of appreciation so that when we stand before Him we sincerely utter His praises. When engaging in an audience with *Hashem*, it is only when we feel privileged to be his servant that we experience true joy. We must pray to *Hashem* to give us the ability to recognize and appreciate the value of being a member of the Chosen People.

## What is the Essence of the Torah?

*Torah*: "If you will not be careful to perform all the words of this *Torah* that are written in this Book, to fear this honored and awesome Name: *Hashem*, your G-d, then *Hashem* will make extraordinary your blows and the blows of your offspring..." It is evident from this verse that the cause of the tragedies that will befall the Jewish people is not failing to keep the *Torah* itself, but rather the non-performance of the *mitzvos*. Failure to keep the *mitzvos* is an indication

that people do not fear and revere the awesome Name of *Hashem*, their G-d.

*Rabbeinu Yona* in his *Sharei Teshuvah* (The Gates of Repentance) and in his commentary on *Pirkei Avos* (*Ethics of Our Fathers*): All of the *mitzvos* of the *Torah* are "*parparaos* (appetizers)" to *yiras shamayim* (Fear of Heaven (*Hashem*)). Just as the appetizer is not intended to satiate the person but rather to stimulate his appetite, so too is the value of all the *mitzvos* of the *Torah* vis-à-vis *yiras shamayim*.

The intrinsic value of performing a *mitzvah* is not for its own sake alone, but also as a demonstration and an expression of one's *yiras shamayim* (fear of heaven). When one observes the *Shabbos*, *tefillin*, dietary laws, etc., one is demonstrating his *yiras shamayim* because the only reason why he is adhering to any of the *mitzvos* is because of his fear and reverence of *Hashem*. The performance of *mitzvos* is therefore a proclamation of one's fear of the Honored and Awesome Name of *Hashem*.

However, if one chooses to compromise or even abandon the *Torah*, it is an affront to the Honored and Awesome Name of *Hashem*. It is an expression of arrogance and brazenness stating, "I could not care less." The verse refers to *Hashem* as "your G-d," indicating that He has a close personal relationship with every Jew – He is not a stranger to the Jews. In fact, the *Mishnah* in Tractate *Shabbos* refers to the Jewish people as "princes – sons of kings". Because of our special relationship with *Hashem* we are truly considered royalty.

*Torah*: When G-d took the Jewish people out of Egypt He had said, "You are my subjects, exclusively Mine." This infers that a Jew is not permitted to subjugate himself to another. Thus it is not permitted to sell himself into slavery.

*Midrash* on *Shir Ha'Shirim* (Song of Songs): One of the opening verses can be interpreted to mean, "The words of the *Sofrim* (the *Rabbis*) are more beloved (to *Hashem*) than the wine of *Torah*." This indicates that *Hashem* values *rabbinic* enactments to a greater degree than the Divine Word – the *Torah* itself.

*Rabbeinu Yonah*: The reason for this is because through the adherence to the *rabbinic* fence one is demonstrating a greater degree of *yiras shamayim*.

The basis for a *rabbinic fence* is human frailty. Because of a person's vulnerability and lack of continuous cognizance, there is a concern that he may violate the *Torah* law. Therefore, the *Chachamim* (*Rabbis*) legislated the various fences to address all conditions so that the *Torah* law should not be violated. Since the essence of all *mitzvos* is one's demonstration of *yiras shamayim* – how much more so is one's adherence to *rabbinic enactments*!

One is not permitted to transport an object four cubits in public domain on the *Shabbos*. For this reason the *Rabbis* prohibited the blowing of the *Shofar* on *Rosh Hashanah* if it should fall out on *Shabbos*. They had concern that one may not be proficient in blowing the *Shofar* and he may transport it through public domain to a teacher (to be taught). The concern of the *Rabbis* that the *Shabbos* may be violated (even in the context of a *mitzvah*) was sufficient enough reason to suspend the *Torah* obligation of blowing the *Shofar*. Their protection of the *Torah*, such as in this case, is the reason why the enactments of the *Rabbis* are more beloved to *Hashem* than the *Torah* law itself.

*Torah*: "Cursed is the one who does not uphold the *Torah*."

*Rabbeinu Yona*: The *Torah* does not state, "cursed is the one who "violates" or does not keep the *Torah*," but rather one who "does not uphold the *Torah*." If one accepts the *Torah* in its entirety and acknowledges that he is fully obligated in every aspect of its *mitzvos*, but he fails in adhering responsibly to its precepts, he does not deserve to be cursed. However, if one selectively accepts laws of the *Torah* (even if he accepted all except for one), this person is classified as not "upholding" the *Torah*. He deserves to be cursed.

A Jew is *Hashem's* subject and the *mitzvos* are the dictates of his Master, *Hashem*. If one says to his master, "I am subservient to you in all aspects of my life except for one area," he would be considered a rebellious subject and deserve to be put to death. Accepting *Hashem's Torah* on a selective basis is the ultimate in brazenness and arrogance. It is an affront and a desecration of the Awesome and Honorable Name of *Hashem*, who is the King who coronates all kings.

If a Jew would understand that he is of princely status and he is part of G-d's Chosen People (The Creator and Master of the Universe), then he would understand and revere the awesomeness of his master. It would not be possible to transgress the *Torah* because he

would understand how privileged he is to do the Will of *Hashem*. Through the study of *Torah*, may we all come to understand the value of ourselves as Jews and the specialness of being part of the Jewish People. Then we will merit the blessing of "Blessed is he who upholds the *Torah*."

## The Value of Being on Call for Hashem

*Torah*: "You shall not wear combined fibers of wool and linen together. You shall make for yourselves twisted threads on the four corners of your garments with which you cover yourself." The *Torah* tells us that one is prohibited from wearing a garment, which contains a combination of wool and linen (*shatnes*). The *Torah* juxtaposes the Negative Commandment prohibiting *shatnes* to the Positive Commandment of wearing *tzitzis* (fringes). If a man wears a four-cornered garment there is a Positive Commandment of attaching *tzitzis* to its corners.

*Chazal*: The juxtaposition of the two teaches us a fundamental principle that if there is a conflict between them then the Positive Commandment supersedes the Negative one. For example, if one has a four-cornered linen garment he is obligated to attach woolen *tzitzis* dyed with *techalis* (special dye from the *chalozon*) to its corners. Although through this attachment one has created a garment which contains a combination of wool and linen, one is nevertheless permitted to wear it in this state. According to the *Torah*, if one attaches the *tzitzis* to such a garment, the value of doing the *mitzvah* elevates it. Also, when one's wardrobe includes such a garment, which represents *mitzvah* and has relevance to doing the Will of *Hashem*, then all the apparel is elevated.

*Ramchal*: The Jew has the ability to elevate the mundane to a status of holiness by associating it with something that is holy – even if at that particular moment the mundane item is itself is not within a *mitzvah* context. The *Torah* empowers the *Sanhedrin* (the High Court of Israel) to sanctify time. It is through the *mitzvah* of the sanctification of the new moon which determines the Jewish calendar. The innate sanctity of every one of the festivals and other days of holiness are determined when the month begins. This determination was given to the Jewish people. The ramifications of being able to determine time in this manner are far reaching.

*Ramchal* in *Derech Hashem* (The Way of G-d) asks – what is the value of sanctifying time? Is the value limited to the specific time that is sanctified? Or is it that since within the realm of time there is sanctity and all time itself is interconnected, then even the ordinary moment takes on an elevated level. The *Ramchal* explains that if a Jew observes *Shabbos*, which is a period of time that is sanctified by *Hashem*, then his weekday is connected to something that is intrinsically holy.

Consequently, even one's ordinary time is connected to holiness and thus elevated. This principle applies to every aspect of our lives. Although much of our speech may be ordinary, nevertheless, since its power is also invested in *mitzvos* such as the recitation of the *Shema* and the study of the *Torah*, all of our speech (even the ordinary) has special value.

By utilizing it to perform a *mitzvah* even one's speech in the context of business is elevated.

We are told that after the giving of the *Torah* at Sinai *Moshe Rabbeinu* was not permitted to cohabit with his wife and this was unlike all other prophets, who were permitted to return to their conjugal responsibilities. As the *Torah* states, "You (*Moshe*) remain with Me (*Hashem*) here." *Moshe* did not require any special degree of preparation to be able to communicate with *Hashem*. His level of prophecy was considered as "face to face" with *Hashem* who was continuously available to communicate with him. No other prophet was at this level because in contrast to *Moshe*, their physicality was not a receptacle of holiness. *Moshe* had to be continuously in a pure state so that the Divine Presence could come upon him at any moment. Therefore he was not permitted

to return to his conjugal responsibilities because he would have become spiritually contaminated as a result of cohabitation.

*Gemara*: There is a principle stating that if one comes upon a *mitzvah* he must perform it without delay. Therefore a Jew must always be "on call," in a state of readiness, to perform a *mitzvah* at any given time when it presents itself regardless of the situation. In the morning, one must put on *tefillin* and declare his belief in *Hashem*. If a Jew is not engaged in a *mitzvah* activity he must interrupt whatever he is doing to perform a *mitzvah* when it presents itself to him. A Jew's perspective of life must be that he is always "on call". If a Jew lives his life with this level of commitment, then even at a time when he is not engaged in a *mitzvah* his entire existence is dedicated to *Hashem*.

Therefore, based on *Ramchal*, a person can elevate his entire existence, even the mundane aspects of his life, by being "on call." One may ask – Why did *Hashem* give us so many *mitzvos* which bind us in every possible way and restrict our behavior? The answer is that *Hashem* gave us the gift of *mitzvos* to allow us to sanctify every aspect of our being whether it be directly associated with the *mitzvah* or being involved with a mundane activity which is elevated because of our readiness to perform a *mitzvah*.



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