

TorahFax: Ki Savo
Rabbi Zalman Marozov

Monday, Elul 11, 5783 (Hakhel Year) August 28, 2023

This Shabbat we read Parshat Ki Tavo. The Parsha begins with the special mitzvah of "Bikurim" – the offering of the "First Fruits".

The Torah states: "And it shall be, when you come to the land which the L-rd your G-d will give you for an inheritance, and you will possess it and dwell in it. You shall take of the first of all the fruit of the land which the L-rd your G-d gives you and you shall put them in a basket and go to the place which the L-rd your G-d shall choose to cause His name to dwell there [Jerusalem]."

Once in Jerusalem, the basket with the first fruits was given to the Kohen (priest). The person bringing the basket of fruit would thank G-d for taking the Jewish people out of slavery in Egypt; for all the miracles which G-d has done for the Jewish people, and for bringing them, "to this place and giving us this land, a land that flows with milk and honey."

The Torah concludes the mitzvah of Bikurim with the following, "And you shall rejoice in all the good which the L-rd your G-d has given you and to your household."

The mitzvah of bringing the first fruits to Jerusalem does not apply today, as we do not have the Holy Temple. Yet, the spirit of Bikurim, applies at all times, through Tzedakah (charity), to give generously. Also, when performing a mitzvah, we should buy the best. For example, the Mezuzah, the Tefillin and the Talit we wear for prayers should be of the finest quality.

The mitzvah of Bikurim teaches us that before we enjoy the bounty and blessings which G-d gave us, we must first give back to G-d what belongs to Him. This is accomplished by giving the first fruits to the Kohen, whose sole duty was to serve in the Holy Temple. Bikurim is another form of Tzedakah, giving back to G-d some of that which He gives us, through giving and helping others.

The Torah says, "And you shall rejoice in all the good which the L-rd your G-d has given you." The mitzvah of Bikurim teaches us to be happy and rejoice with whatever G-d has given us.

Q. How can a person always be happy and rejoice? How can a person rejoice when giving away his/her hard-earned money to charity?

A. The Torah gives us the answer in this verse, "And you shall rejoice in all the good which G-d has given you." A person who believes that whatever he or she has is a gift from G-d ["in all the good which G-d has given you]," will not be jealous of others and thus truly rejoice and be satisfied and happy in life. Recognizing that whatever we have is all G-d's gift to us, makes it easier to share our gifts with others who are in need.

Our sages say, "Who is a wealthy person, one who is happy with his lot!" It's not wealth which brings a person satisfaction and happiness, rather happiness and satisfaction IS wealth!

Tuesday, Elul 12, 5783 (Hakhel Year) August 29, 2023

In this week's Parsha, Ki Tavo, we read about the rewards for adhering to G-d's commandments as well as the punishments for not observing the mitzvot. The Torah even speaks harshly of those who observe the mitzvot, but do not observe them with happiness.

Q. Why is it so important that the mitzvot (G-d's commandments) be observed with joy and happiness?

A. The Magid of Dubna gives the following parable: Two merchants were traveling together from the fair. One was a jeweler and the other a book dealer.

On the way they stopped off at an inn. The jeweler was very hungry, so he asked the porter to bring his merchandise to his room while he went into the dining hall to eat.

The porter mixed up the merchandise and delivered the heavy crate of books to the jeweler's room. Exhausted and dripping with perspiration, he came to the dining hall and asked the jeweler for his pay.

"You made a mistake," said the jeweler to the porter, "you delivered the wrong package!"

"But how do you know? You haven't even been to the room?" wondered the porter.

"My merchandise is not the kind which would cause exhaustion and sweating!"

The same is with mitzvot which, as our sages say, are more precious than diamonds. The way one performs a mitzvah is a sign of how they view G-d's mitzvot.

When a person looks at a mitzvah as a privilege and an honor to perform G-d's commandment, they perform them with joy and happiness, for G-d is the source of life and joy.

Q. What is the significance in that, on Rosh Hashana, the Shofar is blown from the narrow end while the wide end of the Shofar is pointing upward?

A. One of the verses from the Psalms recited before the sounding of the Shofar is, "Out of distress I called G-d; with abounding relief, G-d answered me." The narrow side of the Shofar represents our call of distress, while the wide end of the Shofar, which is pointed upward, represents G-d's answering our call of distress with abounding relief.

Q. After reciting the Kiddush at the Rosh Hashana evening meal, we recite the Hamotzi-blessing over the Challah-bread. But instead of dipping the slice of bread in salt, as we do all year, we dip it into honey. Why do we dip the Challah-bread into honey on Rosh Hashana?

A. It is to express our plea and desire for a sweet and happy new year. Besides honey, we also eat food whose names resemble good and happy meanings. Through these symbolic foods, we pray that G-d grant us a good and sweet year.

Thursday, Elul 14, 5783 (Hakel Year) August 31, 2023

Rosh Hashana is in two weeks, Friday night September 15. From Rosh Hashana until Yom Kippur, we recite four special passages during the Amidah prayers, asking G-d to inscribe us in the Book of Life.

In the first passage we say, "Remember us for life... inscribe us in the Book of Life"; The second passage is, "Who is like You merciful Father, who in compassion remembers His creatures for life."; The third passage is, "Inscribe all the children of Your covenant for a good life."

In the fourth passage we pray to be inscribed, "In the Book of Life, blessing, peace and prosperity, deliverance, consolation and favorable decrees." We begin by asking for the very basic life; after we ask for good life. Then we ask G-d in addition to life, for everything else, blessings, peace, prosperity etc.

In the world we live in today, many are, unfortunately, more occupied with pursuing wealth than with health. In the hustle bustle of day-to-day life our priorities may become distorted, and we tend to forget to appreciate and be thankful for the miracle called life, which G-d grants us every second of every day.

In the Modim prayer, recited three times daily, we thank G-d, "For our lives which are in your hand, and for our souls which are entrusted to You, for your miracles which are with us daily." In the New Year we are reminded of our priorities - to be inscribed in the Book of Life - for life and good health.

A chassid once came to his rebbe complaining that he had a bad year financially. The rebbe asked him, "How is your health and the health of your family?" The chassid replied that health was, thank G-d, good. The rebbe then quoted him the words of the Talmud, "He Who gives life will surely give sustenance!"

The rebbe explained it with a parable, "A wealthy businessman was traveling home from the fair. He had with him a large sum of money. The way home was long and for Shabbat he stopped off at an inn.

"As it is not permitted to carry money on Shabbat, the businessman had no choice but to give his wallet, which contained 5,000 rubles plus 5 kopikes (pennies), to the innkeeper for safekeeping until after Shabbat.

"During Shabbat the businessman was worried whether the innkeeper was trustworthy and will he ever see his money again. Immediately after Shabbat he asked for his wallet which the innkeeper returned.

"The merchant went back to his room to count the money and found all 5,000 rubles intact.

The rebbe now turned to his chassid and asked, "Do you think that after realizing that the innkeeper returned the 5000 rubles, would the businessman still be worried whether the five pennies-kopikes were also returned? Only a fool would suspect the innkeeper in not giving back the five kopikes when he was trustworthy with 5000 rubles!"

"The same is with you," concluded the rebbe. "G-d gave you and your family life which is worth far more than anything else in the world. Don't you think that you can trust Him to give you your livelihood too?

If you have true faith that G-d gives you health, you will automatically have faith that He will bless you in your dealings and will provide you with your livelihood as well, because He Who gives life will surely give sustenance!"

Friday, Elul 15, 5783 (Hakhel Year) September 1, 2023

This Shabbat we read Parshat Ki Tavo, which begins with the mitzvah of "Bikurim" - offering of the "first fruits" to the Kohen-Priest in the Temple.

The Torah states: "When you come to the land which the L-rd your G-d will give you and you will possess it and dwell in it, you shall take of the first of all the fruit of the land which the L-rd your G-d gives you and you shall put them in a basket and go to the place which G-d shall choose to dwell there [Jerusalem]."

Once in Jerusalem, the basket of fruit was given to the Kohen (priest). The person bringing the basket of fruit would thank G-d for taking the people of Israel out of slavery in Egypt; for all the miracles which G-d has done for the Jewish people, and for bringing them, "To this place and giving us this land, a land that flows with milk and honey."

The Torah concludes the mitzvah of Bikurim with the following, "And you shall rejoice in all the good which the L-rd your G-d has given you and to your household."

The mitzvah of Bikurim teaches us that before we enjoy the bounty and blessings which G-d gives us, we must give back some. When giving, one has to give from the first fruits - from the best.

"And you shall rejoice in all the good which the L-rd your G-d has given you." The mitzvah of Bikurim also teaches us to be happy and rejoice with whatever G-d has given us. A person who believes that whatever he or she has is a gift from G-d, will not be jealous of others and thus truly rejoice and be satisfied and happy with their lot in life.

The secret to wealth is taught by our sages in Pirkei Avot (Chapters of our Fathers); "Who is a wealthy person, one who is happy with his lot!" According to Torah, it is not wealth which brings happiness. The opposite is true. Happiness is wealth. The happier we are the richer we are.

The mitzvah of Bikurim didn't apply immediately upon entering into Israel, but 14 years later after they conquered the land and gave everyone their assigned portion in the land. It took seven years to conquer the land and seven years to divide it so that everyone received their parcel of land.

Q. Why did those who already got their land have to wait with this mitzvah until everyone got their land?

A. Our sages explain: The mitzvah of Bikurim was an expression of joy; "And you shall rejoice in all the good which the L-rd your G-d has given you and to your household." However, in the spirit of the mitzvah of Ahavat Yisrael – Love your fellow as yourself, one cannot have complete joy, knowing that one of his brethren is still lacking their parcel of land.

Thus, this mitzvah applied only 14 years after coming into The Promised Land, when all the people had their parcel of land. A wonderful lesson in the mitzvah of Ahavat Yisrael – Love your fellow as yourself!