



Bet Haraah

בית הוראה

Shaare Ezra

שערי עזרא

Parshat Ki Tavo

Zmanim for New York:

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FRUITFUL LESSONS, MARKED PATHS: EMBRACING DESTINY AND GRATITUDE

WRITTEN BY RABBI SHAY TAHAN

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The parsha opens with the mitzvah of bringing *bikkurim*, the first fruits of the seven species of Eretz Yisrael. A farmer brings them to the Beit HaMikdash in a basket, hands them to the Kohen, and recites a declaration recounting the history of the Jewish people—from Yaakov's descent to Egypt, through slavery and redemption, until reaching the Land of Israel.

Looking at a tree full of fruits, how would we know which one grew first? Rashi explains that when the very first fruit begins to ripen, the farmer ties a string around it so that later he can identify it as *bikkurim*.

The same idea applies to separating *maaser* from his animals: The mitzvah of *maaser behemah* is a Torah commandment to set aside every tenth kosher animal born into a person's herd or flock each year, whether cattle, sheep, or goats. The tenth animal becomes sanctified and is brought as a *korban* in the Beit HaMikdash, with certain parts eaten by the kohanim and the rest by the owner in Jerusalem. The method to determine which is the tenth is that as they pass through the pen, the owner counts them one by one and marks every tenth animal with red paint to set it aside as *maaser behemah*.

Since in ancient times the farmer had in his field both the orchard and the animals, let us imagine the following scenario:

The animals in the farm remember how last year the very first fruit was tied with a string. They recall what happened to the fruits that were marked in that way—the fruit was treated royally. Once ripe, it was placed in a beautifully decorated basket and carried with honor to Yerushalayim. Leading the procession was a bull, its horns covered in gold and adorned with olive branches to symbolize royalty. A man playing the flute walked alongside, escorting the convoy. Everyone who saw it along the way stood up, cheering and singing songs. Upon arrival at the Beit HaMik-

dash, a magnificent ceremony took place (Mishna Bikurim perek 3).

The following year, one animal is marked with red paint, designating it as the tenth animal to be brought as a *korban*. Immediately, the animal recalls the glory that befell the fruits selected the previous year, and joy fills its heart as it imagines the same honor awaiting it. What it does not realize is that the mark on its back signifies something very different—it was selected to be slaughtered.

But just as the animal remembers the royal glory of the first fruits, the fruit too has its own memory. The fruit looks back to what happened last year when the farmer marked the tenth animal with red paint. It saw the animal filled with hope and joy, believing it would share in the honor once reserved for the fruits. Yet instead, the animal was led away, before its life ended tragically.

Now, as the farmer ties a string around the first ripening fruit, a shiver runs through it. The fruit trembles at the sight, imagining that the same fate may await it. Its smooth skin seems suddenly fragile, and it clings to the branch as though trying to escape. Every rustle of the leaves sounds like the footsteps of the animal last year, and the fruit's mind fills with dread.

Each believes that the other's fate reflects its own. The animal envies the fruit's beauty and ceremonial honor, imagining that such glory could be his. The fruit, in turn, fears the animal's marked back, thinking that the same danger may befall it. Yet neither understands that their paths are separate and unique. The joy of one cannot shield the other, nor does the peril of one dictate the destiny of the other. Each has its own role, its own purpose, and its own course, unfolding according to a design beyond their comprehension. What appears as similarity or connection is only surface; the truth is that every being moves along a path set for it alone, incomparable to



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another's journey.

Let's take another example from the previous parasha (Ki Tetse). We learn that one may not put a plow on both a bull and a donkey to plow together. Several reasons are brought by the Rishonim for this, but let's focus on the explanation of the Tur. The Tur says that the reason is that the donkey sees the ox constantly chewing and becomes jealous, feeling that the ox is receiving more food than he is. But is this correct?

Let us analyze why the cow appears to be chewing all the time. The reason is that he is chewing his cud. According to the mefarshim, this is because he is a domesticated animal that is always alert to danger from predators. When he needs to eat, he cannot spend all the time chewing, so Hashem created a mechanism for him: he swallows the food quickly without chewing it and stores it in a special part of his stomach. Later, when he reaches a safe place, he brings the food back into his mouth and chews it thoroughly.

The cow, therefore, is never having a pleasant meal, because his food has already been partially digested in his stomach. Bringing it back to his mouth to chew it again is not naturally appetizing. Hashem, however, created it so that he does not feel disgust, yet the meal is not truly enjoyable or flavorful.

In reality, the amount of food the cow receives is the same as the donkey's. The only difference is that the donkey eats it with joy, savoring the taste and eating fearlessly, while the cow must carry it in haste and chew food that is already partially digested. Truthfully, the cow should feel jealous of the donkey's meal. But animals perceive only the surface of things and cannot understand beyond appearances. The cow sees the ox chewing and assumes it is enjoying more, without realizing the true nature of its own experi-

ence.

The lesson is clear: each of us has his own destiny, mission, and challenges. Looking at others can be misleading, because Hashem places every person on a different path with unique tests. For example, while it may seem at first that the neighbor's grass is greener, we do not know his challenges and hardships.

Moreover, even if it appears that our friends have everything good, we should not be jealous, because what seems beneficial for them might be harmful for us. King Shlomo says: *"There is a grievous evil that I have seen under the sun: riches kept for the owner to his detriment"* (Kohelet 5:13). Many times, Hashem grants wealth to a person in order to challenge him—and what looks like success may bring suffering. People may lose marriages, children, Torah learning, or peace of mind. When someone makes an amazing business deal and seems to have "made it," friends may feel envy, not realizing that this very success could be the source of his downfall. The Gra warns in his letter that what brings laughter today may bring sadness tomorrow.

The same is true in the opposite direction. Many times we witness suffering and hardship, not realizing that these very challenges may ultimately be the reason for our growth, strength, and success. Difficulties can refine character, deepen faith, and build resilience that blessings alone could never achieve. What seems like pain or loss in the moment may, in Hashem's plan, prepare us for greater joy, wisdom, or spiritual elevation. Just as the cow and the donkey, or the fruit and the animal, cannot see the full picture of their own destinies, we too often misjudge the purpose of our trials. True perspective comes from understanding that every experience—whether joyous or painful—is uniquely tailored to our path and ultimate mission.

WHEN TO REJOICE: MITZVAH JOY VS. CONSTANT HAPPINESS

The pasuk in the middle of the curses in our Parasha (Ki Tavo) screams out a frightening message: *"because you did not serve Hashem with happiness, and with goodness of heart, by reason of the abundance of all things."* While the Rishonim and Acharonim offer various explanations, some understand it quite literally: the harsh punishments come even though a person may have kept the Torah fully, but without happiness. As the Rambam writes, the joy with which one should rejoice in fulfilling the mitzvot and in loving Hashem who commanded them is itself a great form of service. One who holds himself back from this rejoicing is worthy of punishment, as it is stated: *"...because you did not serve Hashem with happiness and a glad heart."*

This is puzzling: how can a person be expected to force himself to feel happy? Since one fulfills mitzvot throughout the day, how could he possibly maintain a state of continual joy? Happiness is a state of mind; if someone is experiencing difficult times and does not naturally feel happy, how can the Torah demand joy from him? It seems unreasonable to think that the Torah expects

us to be like angels, constantly walking around in happiness. While it is understandable that the Torah commands practical actions, such as performing mitzvot, the inner feelings of the heart seem largely beyond human control.



Orchot Tzadikim (Sha'ar HaSimcha) writes: *"Joy comes to a person who has peace and security without any harm. And a man who achieves his desire without a sad event to mar it will be happy always, and his face will glow and his radiance will gleam, and his body will be healthy and old age will not quickly come upon him, as it is said: 'A merry heart is good medicine' (Mishlei 17:22). From joy will come laughter."*

We see from his words that joy and happiness come automatically when a person's life circumstances are good. If so, how can we expect someone whose life is difficult to force himself into a state of joy?

I have not seen any of the mefarshim deal with our concern, although they do raise a similar question regarding other Mitzvot, such as by the prohibition against envying another person's

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possessions. They ask how one can control his feelings, and while various answers have been suggested, none of them helps to understand the quest of how one could be happy all the time. This question becomes even more pressing in light of the Gra's statement that the mitzvah to be happy on the Chag (והיית אך שמח) is the most difficult mitzvah. If that is the case, how can one be expected to live a life of constant happiness—to the point that failing to do so brings upon him all the punishments listed among the curses?

The answer seems to be that we have the wrong definition of happiness. We tend to think happiness must be either like the joy of Purim—lively, loud, and overflowing, or at least walking around the day feeling joyous as one who had won the lottery. But let us carefully analyze the pasuk. It says: *"because you did not serve Hashem with happiness and with a good heart."* Why the repetition? If one is truly happy, does that not automatically mean he feels good at heart? Rather, the Torah here is defining happiness: happiness means *good heart*. In other words, true happiness is not about external excitement but about cultivating an inner sense of calm, contentment, and gratitude in serving Hashem.

The Orchot Tzadikim directly addresses our question of how to achieve genuine *simcha* despite facing hardships. He answers that *simcha* is attained through *bitachon*. In the chapter on joy, he lays out the principles of *bitachon* to show that true happiness comes only when a person feels with certainty that all his affairs are directed by Hashem. Therefore, even when one experiences painful or difficult events, he should still accept them with joy—because he believes that everything is from above and ultimately for his own good.

Joy Beyond the Mitzvah

Let us deal with another issue in relation to rejoicing: Is a person obligated to always be happy, or more precisely, is it correct or recommended to be happy at all times? The Gemara (Shabbat 30b) addresses this question, stating that one should be happy when performing mitzvot, but not otherwise. As the pasuk hints, happiness without purpose is mocked: *"What is the happiness for?"*

Rabbenu Bechaye writes (*Kad HaKemach, Simcha*) that rejoicing is only proper when performed in the context of a mitzvah. As proof, he notes that nowhere in the sefarim is *simcha* recommended except in relation to mitzvot. Similarly, the Netivot writes in his will (§8): *"My children, you should always distance yourselves from happiness and laughter. Do not listen to those who say that one*

must always be happy, for that is the advice of the yetzer hara. The only time one must be happy is when performing mitzvot." (The Netivot likely wrote those words in opposition to the view of a movement that was growing at the time.)

The *Pele Yoetz* (Simcha) writes that just as it is a mitzvah to be happy when performing a mitzvah, it is forbidden to be happy when it is not the joy of a mitzvah. As the Zohar says, it is forbidden to indulge in worldly happiness since the Beit HaMikdash was destroyed. Likewise, Chazal taught that one should not laugh excessively in this world.

On the other hand it's important to mention that there are opinions that take the opposite stance, holding that one should indeed always be happy, and that doing so is itself considered a great mitzvah. This is the famous teaching of Rav Nachman of Breslov: *"It is a great mitzvah to always be happy."* Those very words are sung at weddings and other joyous events, as though they represent the collective opinion of all authorities.

In one of his most well-known writings (*Likkutei Moharan* II:24), he expounds at length on how a person should strive to live with constant joy—even in matters not directly connected to mitzvot.

Rav Nachman adds: *"It is a great mitzvah to always be in joy, and to strengthen oneself to push away sadness and melancholy with all one's might. All the illnesses that come upon a person—all of them come only from lack of joy. ... In summary, one must exert tremendous effort, with all his strength, to always remain joyous. For human nature is to draw itself toward depression and sadness because of the difficulties and occurrences of life. Since every person is full of suffering, one must compel himself with great force to always be in joy."*

He also writes: *"One should gladden himself in every way possible, even through matters of silliness. Although a broken heart is also very good, nevertheless it should be limited to a set time each day, when a person breaks his heart and pours out his words before Hashem, as is our custom. But the rest of the day must be spent in joy, for from a broken heart one can easily fall into deep melancholy, far more than one is likely to stumble through joy."*

These differences of opinion explain the contrasting approaches we see between other groups and Breslev. According to the first view we mentioned, one should rejoice only while performing mitzvot. Consequently, their davening tends to be more serious, with less singing and rarely any dancing. By contrast, Breslev—following Rav Nachman's teaching that one must always be happy—embraces joy at all times, often dancing and singing even in the streets without any special occasion.

THE CONCLUDING COUNTDOWN: PERFECTING SHABBAT BEFORE ROSH HASHANAH

The esteemed Mirrer Mashgiach, Rabbi Yechezkel Levenstein, singled out—after all, any two consecutive Shabbatot could seem—used to say that the last two weeks before Rosh Hashanah possess special significance. This is based on the teaching of Chazal that if Israel were to keep two consecutive Shabbatot, they would immediately be redeemed (Shabbat 118). Since these final two Shabbatot precede Rosh Hashanah, it is especially fitting to ensure they are observed properly.



ingly achieve the same effect. The answer can be found in the words of the Sfat Emet, who quotes his grandfather, Reb Shmelke. He explains that the final Shabbat of the year gathers within it the essence of all the Shabbatot of the year. In other words, one who keeps that Shabbat is considered as if he has kept all the Shabbatot of the year. Therefore, these two Shabbatot possess the unique ability to repair and elevate

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the Shabbat observance of the entire year. But why are two Shabbatot needed—shouldn't one be enough? The Sfat Emet explains that Shabbat has a profound influence on the week that follows. When one Shabbat is kept in its entirety, it elevates and perfects the coming week. Then, when the following week is already uplifted, the next Shabbat can itself be observed in true perfection. In this way, a complete and flawless week is

achieved—but such a week can only come about through the sanctifying influence of the Shabbat before it.

This comes as a powerful reminder to strengthen ourselves during this last stretch before Rosh Hashanah and to observe Shabbat with all its details and care.

בשבתונים ובקבוצות גדולות כשעושים קידוש והבדלה ברבים יש לציבור לשמוע את כל הברכות של המברך

הראשונה, אע"פ ששמע את שאר ג' ההבדלות לא יצא, כי העיקר הוא ההתחלה, בא"ה אמ"ה המבדיל בין קודש לחול, והסיום בא"ה אמ"ה המבדיל בין קודש לחול.

ולגבי הבדלה על ידי מקרפון, אף שבזה נמצא מועיל שכולם ישמעו את ההבדלה באופן ברור, מכל מקום כתב האגרות משה (או"ח ח"ד סימן צא אות ד') שיש ספק אם יוצא כך שהרי אין זו שמיעה מפי המברך. וידוע שדעת הגר"ע יוסף (יחזקאל דעת ח"ג סימן נד) שאם היה יכול לשמוע את ההבדלה גם בלעדי המקרפון, יוצא ידי חובה גם על ידי המקרפון.

בשבתונים ובקבוצות גדולות כשעושים קידוש והבדלה ברבים יש לציבור לשמוע את כל הברכות של המברך, ואם לא שמע את חתימת הברכות לא יצא ויקדש ויבדיל שוב לבדו. ואין לענות אמן על ברכה שלא שמעה במלואה. ואין לעשות הבדלה על ידי מקרפון.

מצוי מאוד שכשעושים קידוש והבדלה בקבוצות גדולות שאין הציבור שומע את כל הברכות, וזאת מטעם שיש רעש ובמיוחד משום שהרבה עונים אמן לפני סיום הברכות.

ולכן כל אחד ישתדל מאוד להתקרב למברך ולהטות אוזן לכל הברכות, ואם חושש שמא לא ישמע את הברכות במילואן או שכבר נעשתה ההבדלה ולא שמע את כולה, יש מתירים להשלים את מה שהחסיר.

ובספר מאור השבת (ח"ד פסק יג) הביא את פסק הגר"י פישר שאף ששמע רק את סוף ההבדלה, דהיינו את התיבות 'המבדיל בין קודש לחול' יצא בדיעבד. ואם אפשר ילך לשמוע הבדלה מאחר.

והסביר שם בהערה שדבר זה תלוי במחלוקת ראשונים, ושיטה זו היא דעתו של הרי"ף (פסחים כא, א) שסבר שעיקר ההבדלה היא המבדיל בין קודש לחול, וזאת הבדלתו של רבי יהודה הנשיא, וכן סברו הר"ן והמאירי ומהר"ם חלאווה.

אמנם קשה על דברי הגר"י פישר שלא הצריך לשמוע שם ומלכות, והרי קי"ל בשולחן ערוך (סימן ריד ס"א) שכל ברכה שאין בה הזכרת שם ומלכות אינה ברכה, ונדחק בכמה תירוצים.

ושם (בהערה יט) הביא את דעת הגר"ש אלישיב שמי שלא שמע את כל הברכה לכתחילה צריך לשמוע שוב מאחר, ואם אי אפשר לשמוע מאחר או לברך שנית יוצא בדיעבד, ובלבד שישמע את תחילת וסוף הברכה, וגם את ההבדלה הראשונה מהד' ברכות, אבל אם לא שמע ההבדלה



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