

United We Stand

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Parshas Ki Savo

20th of Elul 5785

The Parsha's Path

And it shall be when you come to the land that Hashem your G-d gives you as an inheritance, and you inherit it, and dwell there (26:1).

This week's Parsha opens with the *mitzvah* of *bikkurim*; to bring the first fruits of one's crop to the *kohen* in the Beis Hamikdash and relate before him how G-d brought him to the land. This ceremony is meant to powerfully reinforce one's sense of gratitude and indebtedness to G-d and appreciate his place in the land in the context of Jewish history.

The Kli Yakar makes a striking observation: There is exactly one other place in the Torah that has the exact same wording *and you inherit it, and dwell there*. In fact, that verse bears a remarkable resemblance to our own. It reads, *When you come to the land that Hashem your G-d gives you, and you inherit it, and dwell there, and shall say, "I will set a king over me, like all the nations that are around me"* (Devarim 17:14). What is the connection between the passage about appointing a king and our passage regarding *bikkurim*?

The Kli Yakar suggests that the answer can be gleaned by a close examination of the wording of these verses. The verses state that these things shall be done *when you come to the land that Hashem, your G-d, gives you ... and you inherit it, and dwell there*. The Kli Yakar says that these words represent a fundamentally flawed attitude towards the land. The land of Israel is not an inheritance in the way one inherits property or valuables. It is not simply given by G-d to do with as we please. Nor is it appropriate to feel so secure to say we "*dwell there*." Eretz Yisrael is a heritage the way Torah is a heritage; it must be carefully safeguarded to use in accordance with the will of G-d, sanctified by constant awareness of His presence and vigilance in performing His commandments.

The Torah warns us that it is in our nature to take this sacred heritage for granted. As with all things in life, when we have it and we feel secure in it, we begin to feel entitled to it and free to do as we please within it. This is why, in the days of Shmuel, we would want a king placed over us; our feelings of entitlement over the land led us to want to copy the surrounding nations in establishing the same kind of government they had. (The Kli Yakar understands in accordance with the view of the Talmud that kingship is really a less ideal institution; similar to the *isha yefas to'ar*, the Torah provided concessions to help modulate our less-than-ideal nature.)

The Kli Yakar explains that the *mitzvah* of *bikkurim* comes precisely to counteract this toxic attitude of entitlement. By coming to present the first fruits to the *kohen*, declaring our humble origins and how G-d brought us to the land and gave us our bounty, we reinforce the message that all the good we have comes from G-d. Without Him, we would have fallen to our oppressors long ago and never have even reached the land.

This past painful week is a sobering reminder of this critical message. As the second half of this week's Parsha teaches us, when we fail to turn to G-d out of His goodness, we may be forced to turn to Him out of tragedy. May this be the last.

Since making aliyah just a couple of weeks ago, I have been overwhelmed by feelings of gratitude and insufficiency. Gratitude for the incredible miracle of our return to the Land of Israel and the privilege of being part of it, and insufficiency in my contribution towards it. Earlier this week, due to a series of incidents of *hashgacha pratit*, I found myself at the Kotel Plaza as the new *Tzanchanim* unit was being inaugurated. Practically the entire plaza was full of rows and rows of soldiers, as each was handed their Tanach and their gun. Who could hold back their tears? These men, younger than me, are *zocheh* to carry on the legacy of the army of David in the first Jewish army in over 2,000 years, being inaugurated next to the *makom Beis Hamikdash*, risking their lives for *Am Yisrael* with complete dedication - while I stand safely on the sidelines.

Obviously, we all have different roles to play in our *Avodas Hashem* (and I have indeed asked the *shailah*, multiple times, about drafting). Yet the question reverberates inside me - am I doing enough? G-d has given us such a precious gift, and we remain in such a tenuous situation and desperately need more *zechusim* - am I really doing everything I can for *Klal Yisrael*? Am I being as *moser nefesh* as I should be?

Whatever answers I find for myself are personal, but it's crucial to ask those questions, to feel that burning sense of gratitude and responsibility, and reflect on how we can do our part to bring about a brighter future for all of *Klal Yisrael*.

Deeper Meanings

Adapted from 5781.

This week's Parsha begins with two adjacent *mitzvos*: *bikkurim* (the first fruits which are brought to the Beis-Hamikdash and given to the Kohen) and *vidui ma'asros* (the "happy confession" of one who has taken all his tithes properly). *Bikkurim* is about showing gratitude to G-d for everything He's done for us, while *vidui ma'asros* appears to be about appreciating one's own accomplishments. Why does the Torah place these two *mitzvos* next to each other?

Before we answer this question, we need to investigate the details of these *mitzvos*, which are surprisingly similar. Both involve ascending to the Beis-Hamikdash and making a declaration in the presence of a *kohen*. In the case of the *bikkurim*, this declaration is accompanied by a basket of one's choicest fruit which one gives to the *kohen*; in the case of *vidui ma'asros*, while no actual fruits are given to the *kohen*, the fruits play a key role in the declaration: *When you have set aside in full the tenth part of your yield ... and have given it to the*

Levite, the stranger, the fatherless and the widow ... you shall declare before Hashem (26:12-13). While one does not physically give of his crops with *vidui ma'asros*, the verse places the *vidui* immediately following a description of the fruits he has given as tithes. In addition, when one gives *bikkurim*, one's declaration consists of a synopsis of Jewish history, and expresses gratitude not only for the blessings he has now received but also for the redemption from suffering and the many miracles it took to arrive at that point. In the case of *vidui ma'asros*, there is also a historical account of sorts, as one recounts in detail how he has observed all of the laws of tithes, not eating of it in times of mourning or destroying it while he was impure, nor giving it to be used for the needs of the dead.

These parallels suggest that there is a fundamental similarity in the gratitude one should have to G-d as epitomized by *bikkurim*, and one's pride as exemplified in *vidui ma'asros*. This parallel seems surprising and strange. We can easily understand the importance of appreciating G-d, but to put one's own pride on the same level seems incomprehensible. This problem is highlighted by the concluding verse in the declaration of *vidui ma'asros*: *Look down from Your holy abode, from the heavens, and bless your people Israel and the soil You have given us ...* (26:15). Chazal point out that if we take this verse in the context of the previous verses, where the person declares his own accomplishments, one is essentially saying to G-d, "I did my part, now You do Yours." How can we equate our accomplishments with G-d's beneficence?

Rav Soloveitchik famously argues that there are two critical ingredients to serving G-d: majesty - that is, expressing our own creativity and utilizing our resources in Divine service, and humility, pulling back in submission to His will. The only way to serve G-d is by making both majesty and humility integral components of our lives, and it is this duality which epitomizes the request, "I did my part, now You do Yours." The one doing *vidui ma'asros* tells G-d, "I just did everything I was supposed to do. I have fulfilled my mandate to live a life of majesty. But I'm not walking away. I'm not only living up to the majesty of the Torah, but to the humility of it as well. Even with everything I've done on my end, I can't do it without You. I did my part, and now I need You to do Yours." The climax of Divine service is when, at the helm of accomplishment, one reaffirms his dependence on G-d. He thereby connects the majesty of everything he's done with the majesty of G-d in a relationship that transcends that of a needy servant to a Master, and one becomes, in a sense, a partner or spouse, intimately sharing a common set of values and traits.

Majesty and humility are epitomized by both these forms of gratitude: pride in oneself and appreciation of G-d. The shared components between *bikkurim* and *vidui ma'asros* facilitate our sense of happiness and gratitude. Giving bridges one's submission to G-d - through providing for the kohen and the poor - with his pride - in using his resources in the Divine service. Similarly, articulating our past struggles and achievements also conveys both themes. By reflecting on the past and what brought us to the present, celebrating the good, giving and growing in accordance with our values, we achieve a profound level of joy and appreciation for G-d.

It is fitting that these mitzvot preface the rest of the Parsha, which primarily discusses the curses that we face if we fail to serve G-d properly. By preempting the curses with a message of positivity, both about ourselves and G-d, we learn to put the curses in context: Fear and Regret only have a place as a supplement to Love and Positivity. The primary way we strive to serve G-d is by cultivating our gratitude, by being proud of what we've accomplished, thankful for what G-d has given us, and showing our thanks by continuing to give and grow. As we enter into Selichos and approach the Days of Awe, this message is particularly important: as much as we turn our attention to our sins and the ways we need to do better, this must be contextualized within the joyous framework of the season, with the gratitude we have to G-d for the opportunity to continue to grow and strive to do better, the satisfaction of seeing what we've done right, and the delight in being able to subject ourselves to G-d's rule and re-coronate Him as King. The pain of penitence is pertinent primarily as a pathway to positivity and pride by parting the partitions of past sin which prevent us from perceiving our potential and the prestige of the Almighty. Let us strive to infuse these days with joy and gratitude, remembering our past while celebrating and reshaping our present and future, and merit the full ecstasy of a stronger connection to G-d with the Ultimate Redemption.

Goal of the week

Reflect on one way you can increase your contribution to Klal Yisrael.

This week's bulletin is dedicated to a Refuah Sheleima for Yisroel Zev ben Menya Rochel, Masha Sarah bas Tziviah Leah, Gavriel Margoliot Ben Malka, and all those injured in the war and the chatufim. Please have them in mind in your Tefillos.

Have A Great Shabbos !!

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