



Yesodos m' ha Sedra

LESSONS IN HASHKAFKA & HALACHA FROM THE PARSHA

פ ר ש ת - כ י - ת ב ו א

ברכת ביכורים

As fruits begin to grow, the owner of the field ties a ribbon around those first to ripen and consecrates it as bikurim. A short while later, he travels to Yerushalayim and presents it to Hakadosh Boruch Hu the kohanim. Yet the wording of the posuk is somewhat peculiar in that the Torah instructs him to present his basket of bikurim to "the kohein in his days". Certainly, he cannot present it kohanim who have either passed away, or who have not yet been born. Moreover, this wording is used elsewhere and usually refers to the kohein gadol. Bikurim however, were presented to any ordinary kohein. This begs explanation. Additionally, if we pay careful attention to the text of the declaration, we will notice that the bearer of the bikurim fruits tells the kohein how "Hashem Elokecha" (YOUR G-d) brought him to Eretz Yisroel. This certainly begs understanding; if he is in the middle of the mitzva of bikurim, why doesn't he realize that Hashem is his G-d as well?

In offering his approach to these questions, the Netziv prefaces as follows: A major avodah in life, and one of the primary reasons we are commanded to tithe our produce etc., is to recognize that our wealth and bounty does not come through our own efforts alone, but is due to the beracha the Ribono shel Olam gives us, and the way to merit the beracha is by supporting the kohanim who are completely involved in the service of Him. In articulating this, the field owner stresses that it is "the kohein's G-d" Who is the source of beracha and by



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bringing the first fruits to him, he will be able to tap into that wellspring. So, explains the Netziv, this simple formula of giving to get is expressed ever so subtly in the bikurim declaration. The formula however, is not limited to support of kohanim who serve in the beis ha'Mikdash. Supporting Torah scholars who dedicate their lives to serving Hashem and studying His Torah, falls into the same category. They, are what the posuk calls 'the kohanim that live in other times'.

On Rosh Hashana we stand before Hakadosh Boruch Hu and beseech Him for all our needs. We daven for health and peace too, but we all know that our parnasa for the coming year is decided on that day. If we commit to supporting Torah, we have tapped in to the source of beracha for parnasa and will b'ezras Hashem merit to have it flow down to us!

ושמחת בכל הטוב וכו' אתה והלוי וכו'

Our parsha begins with the mitzvah of bikurim. Every year, Jews from all over Eretz Yisroel would bring the first fruits that grew in their fields to Yerushalayim. There, they would enter the Beis HaMikdash with the fruits in a basket and make a thank-you declaration for all that Hakadosh Boruch Hu has given them. The declaration however, does not begin completely upbeat. First, he stands, basket in hand proclaiming how Lavan attempted to destroy us and



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ultimately caused us to be enslaved in Mitzrayim where the Egyptians forced us to do hard labor. Only after much oppression, Hashem Yisborach took us out and brought us to Eretz Yisroel where we are able to grow such beautiful fruits. This declaration is an integral part of the mitzvah of bikurim. It therefore comes as somewhat of a surprise that shevet Levi is included in this mitzvah. Although, as Rashi explains, levi'im who grow fruits in their cities must perform the mitzvah of bikurim, it seems hard to understand how they could approach the mizbayach and declare how their fathers were enslaved in Mitzrayim. After all, the entire shevet Levi was spared from the hard labors in Mitzrayim.

HaRav Aizik Ausband zt"l explains that we see from here the greatness of one who is noseh b'ol chaveiro - who helps carry his friend's burden. We tend to think that sympathizing with other people's difficulties is little more than just not acting callous. Although it can be no more than this, we must realize we are all connected with our fellow Jews and when any one of us is in pain, it should bother all of us. Often we cannot help and even if we can, we cannot possibly help everyone all of the time. However, other people's pains should bother us. When a child is rachmana l'tzlan very ill, his parents don't feel his physical pain, but they are pained. So is his immediate family, and albeit to a lesser degree, so is his extended family and community, etc. Shevet Levi understood that they were the extended family of the rest of k'lal Yisroel and so when everyone else was forced to do back-breaking labors, they too felt the pain. They, were



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enslaved as well and their descendants can legitimately proclaim “we were oppressed and forced to work!”. Historically, shevet Levi were the disseminators of Torah. This is one lesson we should be sure not to miss!

ככל מצותך אשר צויתני וכו'...

After separating truma and ma'aser on the first and second years of the shmita cycle, ma'aser sheni is separated from all produce. It is then brought to Yerushalayim and eaten b'kedusha v'tahara. The third year this tithe is called ma'aser ani and is given to the poor. The fourth year the cycle begins once again. There are many dinim that govern the eating and handling of trumos and ma'aseros.

In the third (and sixth) year of the cycle is the mitzvah of viduy ma'aser; every Jew who separated or handled fruits subject to the halachos of trumos and ma'aseros comes to the beis hamikdash and declares that he did not violate any of the rules governing ma'aser. He announces, "I have done everything as You have commanded!"

It comes as somewhat of a surprise that this monologue be referred to as viduy ma'aser. Viduy is usually translated as confession. We are all familiar with the viduy we say during selichos and on Yom Kippur; ashamnu, bagadnu, gazalnu, (we have been guilty, treacherous, we have stolen); it is an itemization



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of all the things we have done wrong. To call a declaration of doing everything right, viduy, is shocking to say the least.

HaRav Mottel Katz זצ"ל suggests the following approach and thus redefines our understanding of viduy and its role in teshuva: The ultimate purpose in confessing our sins is not just to simply verbalize all of our shortcomings. In fact, one can fulfill his obligation of viduy by simply declaring "I have sinned". This is hardly explicit.

Explains Reb Mottel זצ"ל that the root of the word viduy is "modeh" - to admit. The main purpose of viduy is to come to the realization of who we are and where we stand. By articulating that we have not fulfilled our responsibilities and that we have erred, we can move on and grow in our service of Hashem.

Inasmuch as realizing our shortcomings can be an impetus for our growth in ruchnius in that we want to do better, proper contemplation of our own greatness and achievements can also inspire us to move forward and keep improving. Proper separation of tithes in temple times meant no less than separating approximately twenty-two percent of one's produce. Imagine the farmer who has slaved away in his field. His land finally yields produce and he



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must part with over one fifth of the crop. He does it with simcha and makes a beracha to thank Hashem for the opportunity of the mitzvah. This is greatness. It is incumbent upon him to realize his success. Focusing on what he has done right will enable him to continue to grow and achieve.

אלה יעמדו לברך וכו'

HaRav Moshe Shternbuch notes that while the k'lalos were pronounced in the singular "arur ha-ish" (cursed in the one...), the berachos were given to the nation as a whole. From here we can gain a tremendous insight into the chesed of the Ribono shel Olam in how He deals with k'lal Yisroel.

Every yid has the power to better the entire Jewish nation through his Torah and mitzvos. When we fulfill the ratzon Hashem by learning Torah and doing mitzvos, we turn on the spiritual faucets of beracha. This flow lands not only on the one responsible for 'turning on the tap' but rather on all of k'lal Yisroel for them to enjoy.

This is not quite the case with aveiros. While it is true that kol Yisroel arevim zeh lazeh. - all Jews are guarantors for one another - and ultimately our sins do have an impact on the rest the nation, nevertheless the curses that ensue from anaveira affect that person alone.



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כ' - תבוא פרשת

The mechanics of how this works and why is a realm we need not delve into, but the fact remains that our actions have a positive effect on the rest of our people. In times such as these, when every day seems to bring with it a new set of tzaros, we must bear in mind that instead of giving up in despair, strengthening our own avodah of Torah and mitzvos can have a profound positive impact on all of k'lal Yisroel.