

Parsha Shiur by Rabbi Mayer Friedman

פרשת כי תבוא

ובאת אל הכהן אשר יהיה בימים ההם ואמרת אליו הגדתי היום לה' אלקיך כי באתי אל הארץ אשר נשבע ה' לאבותינו לתת לנו
“You shall come to whomever will be the priest in those days, and you shall say to him: I declare today to Hashem, your G-d, that I have come to the land that Hashem swore to our forefathers to give to us” (26:3)

The mitzva of bikkurim includes two separate and distinct mitzvos. One must bring the bikkurim to the Bais HaMikdash and he must also read the verses that express gratitude to Hashem. The Sefer HaChinuch says that the reading of the verses has an important value of its own because articulating our gratitude helps us think about what we are saying and gain a much greater appreciation of what we have to be thankful for. The action of bringing the bikkurim is not enough on its own. It must also be accompanied by words. Expressing our gratitude verbally helps us think about the good that Hashem has bestowed upon us and lets us digest the full measure of the kindness that He does.

Showing gratitude for kindnesses performed by others is extremely important. The Gemara tells a story about a rabbi who went to the market and saw something that he thought his wife might like and bought it for her. His students asked him why he bought things for his wife if she did not treat him well. He said that he was nevertheless obligated to repay her for the good things that she was doing for him, namely, protecting him from sin and educating the children. R' Chaim Shmuelevitz commented on this story: Hakaras hatov means that one should be grateful even if the other person is gaining as well. She was not saving him from sin for him only, but for herself as well. Even though she was also benefiting through her good deeds, he still felt the need to recognize them. A person should focus on what he is receiving and not worry about whether the person did it for himself or not. One must show his gratitude to his benefactor regardless of whether the kind deed was done solely for his sake or not.

Another lesson from this story is the importance of kindness in a marriage. A Jewish marriage is a close connection, a kinyan. The husband must acquire the wife in order for them to merge into one couple. This is done by giving the woman an object of value. We learn that a marriage must be done through an acquisition from the use of similar wording in the Torah referring to marriage and to Avraham's purchase of the Me'aras Hamachpeila from Efron. Why is this concept learned from an episode involving death? The answer lies in the nature of kindness performed for the dead. When one occupies himself with a burial, he knows that the dead person will never repay him, and yet he does it anyway. This is called a chesed shel emes, a kindness of truth. There is no higher level of chesed. By using similar wording in reference to a marriage, the Torah teaches us that marriage must involve a similar unconditional love. A husband and wife should do nice things for one another only in order to do something nice for them. Kindness in marriage cannot be dependent on what will be given in return. This story teaches us the importance of this attitude regarding kindness in a marriage.

ועתה הנה הבאתי את ראשית פרי האדמה אשר נתתה לי ה' והנחתו לפני ה' אלקיך
השתחוית לפני ה' אלקיך
“And now, behold, I have brought the first fruit of the ground that You have given me,

Hashem. And you shall lay it before Hashem, your G-d, and you shall prostrate yourself before Hashem, your G-d” (26:10)

The Midrash comments on this posuk that the word "now" means that the mitzvah must be done immediately. The word "behold" means that it is done in a joyous manner. "I am bringing" means that the person brings it from his own property.

The Divrei Shaarei Chaim writes that through this statement that one makes when bringing the bikkurim, the Torah teaches us how one must do all mitzvos. Every mitzvah should be approached with "zerizus," "zealousness," and one must jump at every chance to do a mitzvah as soon as the opportunity is presented to him. One should also do every mitzvah with a feeling of joy. If one would appreciate the mitzvos, he would enjoy doing them and would do more mitzvos. A person must also spend some of his own money in order to do a mitzvah. When a person gives up something from his own for a mitzvah, it makes the mitzvah more meaningful and leads to more enthusiasm for the mitzvah.

**ושמחת בכל הטוב אשר נתן לך ה' אלקיך ולביתך אתה והלוי והגר אשר בקרבך
“You shall rejoice with all the beneficence that Hashem, your G-d, has given you and your household - you and the Levite and the proselyte who is in your midst” (26:11)**

When a person receives a gift, the value of the gift itself is only one aspect of how special the gift is. Its value is enhanced by the status of the benefactor as well. When a person receives a medal from the president, it is not the medal that is valuable, but the fact that it came from the president. A gift is only as significant as where it came from.

This is why the posuk says to rejoice in the good "that Hashem gave you." One should really appreciate the good that he has because it comes directly from Hashem. This recognition lends a tremendous significance to a person's property and the blessings that receives.

**לא אכלתי באני ממנו ולא בערתי ממנו בטמא ולא נתתי ממנו למת שמעתי בקול ה'
אלקי עשיתי ככל אשר צויתני**

“I have not eaten of it in my intense mourning, I have not consumed it in a state of contamination, and I have not given of it for a dead person; I have hearkened to the voice of Hashem, my G-d; I have acted according to everything You commanded me” (26:14)

R' Yechiel London comments that people always doubt themselves and their capabilities. It is natural for a person to question whether he can possibly live up to his calling. After all, keeping Torah and mitzvos and acting as a Jew should can often seem to be a daunting task. Nevertheless, the Torah commands every single Jew to say that he has done all that Hashem has commanded him. This teaches us that accomplishing what Hashem asks is not beyond our reach. Hashem does not ask us to do anything that we cannot do. In fact, the Rambam says that every single person has the ability to become as righteous as Moshe Rabbeinu. Every individual has the ability to become a great person and to do "as Hashem has commanded him." One should not be discouraged by failures, but rather should be spurred on to keep trying by the knowledge that he has it in him to succeed.

**וידבר משה והכהנים הלויים אל כל ישראל לאמר הסכת ושמע ישראל היום הזה נהיית
לעם לה' אלקיך**

“Moshe and the Kohanim, the Levites, spoke to all Israel, saying: Be attentive and hear, Israel - this day you have become a people to Hashem, your G-d” (27:9)

Rashi says that "today you have become a nation" means that you should look at the Torah as if you had entered the covenant with Hashem to keep it this very day. There is nothing as relevant as today's news and nothing as irrelevant as yesterday's news. The Torah cannot be approached as an ancient book that was important many years ago. It is a new Torah and is applicable every single day. When Torah and mitzvos has that new feeling every day, one approaches it with excitement, just like the feeling that a person has when he purchases something new and uses it for the first time.

R' Samson Raphael Hirsch writes that this transformation into a nation is based upon the acceptance of the Torah. It is neither the Land of Israel nor the Hebrew language that makes a Jewish nation. It is the acceptance of the mitzvos and the commitment to their performance that transforms us into a nation. The Torah is the defining characteristic of Am Yisrael. With or without Eretz Yisrael, we remain a nation and the people of Hashem because we still have the Torah of Hashem and we keep his mitzvos.

ארור מכה רעהו בסתר ואמר כל העם אמן

“Accursed is one who strikes his fellow stealthily.’ And the entire people shall say, ‘Amen’” (27:24)

Rashi comments that the curse against hitting another person in stealth refers to speaking loshon hara, slander. If this is true, why does the Torah need to disguise the true meaning of the curse? The answer is that this teaches us the severity of evil speech. By comparing gossip to physically hitting a person, we learn that talking badly about a person is not just meaningless words being thrown around. When one slanders someone else, it is as if he had hit the person from behind, in stealth. While we can easily grasp the evil inherent in hitting a person, it is sometimes easy for a person to toss aside the ramifications of his speech because they are not necessarily visible. By disguising its true meaning, the Torah teaches us an important lesson about the power of speech.

The prohibition against slander and gossip is often taken lightly. We can see the severity of this mitzvah because it is mentioned in the section of the curses. Even though cursing someone is usually improper, the Torah places a curse on the transgressors of these eleven aveiros, including loshon hara.

ארור אשר לא יקים את דברי התורה הזאת לעשות אותם ואמר כל העם אמן

“Accursed is one who will not uphold the words of this Torah, to perform them.’ And the entire people shall say, ‘Amen’” (27:26)

The last of the curses is for one who does not uphold the Torah. Ramban explains that this means that everyone must see the writing in the Sefer Torah during hagbahah, the raising of the Sefer Torah after it is read. This obligation to see the writing also applies to women. One who is assigned the task of raising the Sefer Torah and does not “lift up” the Torah for all to see is held accountable.

Ramban gives a second explanation of this curse. Lifting up the Torah refers to a leader who is capable of upholding the Torah and leading the people. If one has the power to lead people back to Hashem and does not utilize these abilities, he is responsible and is deserving of a curse. Conversely, there is a blessing for one who does what he should and uses his abilities and influence to uphold the Torah and lead others onto the right path.

Everyone can lift up the Torah in their own way. Every single person is watched by others and influence others through their actions. One must be careful to act appropriately at all times

in order to lead others in the right direction. Active leadership is also very important. Organizing shiurim and minyanim and recruiting people to attend them, at home but also especially in the universities, is very important and is a way of fulfilling this mitzva.

ברוך אתה בעיר וברוך אתה בשדה

“Blessed shall you be in the city and blessed shall you be in the field” (28:3)

The Divrei Shaarei Chaim explains this posuk to mean that in the merit of mitzvos that one does in the city, outside his own home, he will be blessed in his own field and his own private domain. Some people attempt to hide their Judaism when they leave their house. They are embarrassed of their religion and they are afraid of what other people will think about it. There is no need to be ashamed of who you are. One should lead by example in front of others. The Rama writes in the first Siman of Orach Chayim that one should never be embarrassed in front of people who ridicule him for serving Hashem. One has to remain steadfast in his convictions and not allow the reaction of outsiders to affect how he expresses his Judaism.

Baruch College/NYU Parsha Shiur
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