

Parsha Potpourri

Parshas Ki Savo – Vol. 21, Issue 45

Compiled by Ozer Alport

'ועתה הנה הבאתי את ראשית פרי האדמה אשר נתת לי ד' (והנחתו לפני ד' אלקיך והשתחוית לפני ד' אלקיך) 26:10

A farmer is required to bring bikkurim, the first ripened fruits of the seven species for which the land of Israel is praised, to the Temple in Jerusalem, where he presents them to a Kohen as an expression of hakaras hatov – gratitude to Hashem for giving him a successful harvest. The Midrash Tanchuma (1) teaches that Moshe prophetically saw that the Bais HaMikdash would one day be destroyed, and it would no longer be possible to perform the mitzvah of bringing bikkurim there. As a partial substitute for this mitzvah, Moshe enacted that Jews should instead pray three times daily. This midrash is difficult to understand. What is the connection between bikkurim and prayer, two mitzvos that at first glance appear to be completely unrelated?

In his sefer Minchas Asher, Rav Asher Weiss points out that the concept of prostrating oneself appears several times in the Torah. When Yaakov encountered Eisav in Parshas Vayishlach, Yaakov, his wives, and his children attempted to pacify the irate Eisav by bowing down to him in a display of submission (Bereishis 33:1-7), just as somebody who meets the King or Queen in many cultures is required to bow down as an acknowledgment of their power and dominion.

The Torah also records (Ibid., 24:52) that when Eliezer succeeded in finding Rivkah as a wife for Yitzchok, he prostrated himself on the ground to Hashem. Similarly, when the Jewish people in Egypt heard from Moshe and Aharon that they would soon be redeemed from their bitter enslavement, they bowed down and prostrated themselves (Shemos 4:31). In these two cases, the bowing was not an expression of subservience, but rather of appreciation to Hashem.

Rav Weiss notes that in Shemoneh Esrei, there are two blessings in which we are required to bow: the first blessing of Magen Avrohom, and the penultimate blessing known as Modim. Our bowing in these two blessings represents the two different types of prostration. As we begin to address Hashem in the first blessing, we immediately bow as a sign of submission. Toward the end of our prayers, we bow again in the blessing of Modim as an expression of thanksgiving for all the good that Hashem continuously does for us.

Applying this dichotomy to the mitzvah of bikkurim, when the Torah commands the farmer to bring his first fruits to the Temple and prostrate himself, to which type of bowing is it referring – submissiveness or gratitude? Tosefos (Sukkah 47b) writes that while the Kohen waved the bikkurim, the farmer bowed down as a part of the ceremony. Since showing hakaras hatov is one of the central themes of the mitzvah of bikkurim (Chinuch 606), this bowing down is an expression of appreciation.

The Vilna Gaon disagrees and writes in Aderes Eliyahu that the farmer's prostration is not an integral component of the bikkurim ceremony, but rather it is due to a separate law that requires a person to bow down before leaving the Bais HaMikdash and departing from the presence of the Shechinah. According to this explanation, bowing down demonstrates subservience.

The Gemara teaches (Eiruvin 13b) that whenever there are legitimate disputing opinions, both are considered valid expressions of Hashem's will. Accordingly, the farmer's prostration when performing the mitzvah of bringing bikkurim to the Temple contains within it aspects of both submission and thanksgiving to Hashem.

With this introduction, Rav Weiss explains that the midrash teaches that when Moshe prophetically saw that the ability to perform the mitzvah of bikkurim would be lost when the Bais HaMikdash was destroyed, he was disturbed that we would no longer be able to bow down to Hashem to express our submission and gratitude to Him. Therefore, Moshe enacted that we should instead use the

medium of praying Shemoneh Esrei thrice daily as a replacement, since it also offers us the opportunity to humbly bow at the beginning to acknowledge Hashem as our King, and to bow near the end to show our thanks for all that He does for us constantly.

**אלה יעמדו לברך את העם על הר גרזים בעברכם את הירדן שמעון ולוי ויהודה ויששכר ויוסף ובנימין
(ואלה יעמדו על הקללה בהר עיבל ראובן גד ואשר וזבולן דן ונפתלי 27:12-13)**

In Parshas Ki Savo, Moshe told Bnei Yisroel that when they entered the land of Israel, they should recommit themselves to mitzvah observance. In addition to writing the entire Torah on twelve large stones and bringing offerings, Moshe commanded them to ascend two large mountains and confirm their commitment and dedication to the Torah. Specifically, he said that the members of the tribes of Shimon, Levi, Yehuda, Yissochar, Yosef, and Binyomin should stand on Mount Gerizim for the delivering of the blessings, while the tribes of Reuven, Gad, Asher, Zevulun, Dan, and Naftoli should assemble on Mount Eival for the pronouncement and acceptance of the curses.

The Gemara in Sotah (37a) raises a difficulty with this understanding of Moshe's instructions, as when the time came to actually carry them out, the pasuk (verse) in Yehoshua (8:33) states clearly that the Kohanim and Levites were down below with the Aron in the valley between the two mountains. How can this be reconciled with the straightforward reading of the pasuk in the Torah which requires the tribe of Levi to be up on Mount Gerizim, not down in the valley?

The Gemara presents three resolutions to this apparent contradiction, one of which is that those Kohanim and Levites who were fit for Divine service remained below in the valley with the Aron, while those who were not fit ascended the mountain in fulfillment of Moshe's instructions. In his commentary on the Gemara, Rashi understands the Gemara's criterion of "fit for service" as referring to those eligible to carry the Aron, namely those between the ages of 30 and 50. The Maharsha, on the other hand, maintains that it refers to the descendants of Levi's son Kehas, who were placed in charge of the Aron (Bamidbar 4:1-20).

As there are no coincidences in the Torah, the commentators discuss the deeper significance of the division of the tribes in the manner prescribed by Moshe. In an article in Tradition magazine, Steven Weiner points out that, from a purely mathematical perspective, there is a straightforward and elegant explanation for splitting the tribes this way.

There are 462 different possible ways to divide twelve objects into two groups of six. Using the most recent census data in the Torah (Ibid., 26:2-65) and the Gemara's aforementioned explanation of the division of the tribe of Levi, an examination of each of the 462 possible ways of splitting up the tribes reveals that the division ordained by Moshe is the most equitable of them all, meaning that this arrangement minimizes the difference in population between the two mountains better than any other possible division.

This is the case according to the interpretations of the Gemara's expression "fit for service" given by both Rashi and the Maharsha. Moreover, according to the Maharsha, the number of Jews on Mount Gerizim was 307,929, and the number of Jews on Mount Eival was 307,930, a difference of only one.

Parsha Points to Ponder (and sources that discuss them):

- 1) A farmer is required to bring bikkurim (first fruits) to the Beis Hamikdash (Devarim 26:2). The Gemara in Bava Kamma (92a) teaches that the rich brought their bikkurim in baskets made of gold and silver, while the poor placed their fruits in reed baskets made from willow branches. The Kohanim gave back the expensive baskets to the wealthy, while keeping those brought by the poor. As the rich farmers could much more easily afford to part with their baskets than the poor, wouldn't it have made more sense to do just the opposite? (Darkei Mussar)
- 2) The Mishnah (Pesachim 116a) teaches that a key component of the Haggadah Shel Pesach is expounding upon the pesukim (Devarim 26:5-9) that pertain to national history that are recited by

a person bringing bikkurim to the Beis Hamikdash. The Mishnah says that one should begin from ארמי אבד אבי – an Aramean attempted to destroy my father – and continue discussing each pasuk until completing the entire section. Why do we discuss the first four pesukim in this section but omit a discussion of the final verse, which gives praise to Hashem for bringing us to the land of Israel and giving us the Beis HaMikdash? (Haggadah Shel Pesach Halaylah Hazeh)

- 3) Moshe told Bnei Yisroel that on the day they crossed the Jordan and entered Eretz Yisroel, they should reaffirm their commitment to the Torah. As part of this ceremony, they were to build a stone altar on Mount Eival, bring sacrifices upon it, and eat peace-offerings while rejoicing before Hashem (Devarim 27:4-7). Afterward, the members of six tribes were to stand on Mount Gerizim for the acknowledgment of blessings for the observance of certain mitzvos, while the other six tribes would stand on Mount Eival to accept curses for those who transgress them. Why did Moshe instruct them to offer sacrifices and rejoice on the mountain that represented punishment rather than on the mountain associated with beracha? (Oznayim L'Torah)
- 4) In the lengthy list of punishments that will befall those who transgress the Torah's laws, which three of the makkos (10 plagues) are mentioned? (Torah Teasers)

Answers to Points to Ponder:

1) **Rav Aharon Bakst** explains that although financial considerations would dictate keeping the baskets of the rich, there were also psychological factors to be weighed. The baskets of the wealthy were filled with fruits numerous in both quantity and quality, while those of the poor contained a few meager fruits. If the Kohanim removed the fruits from the poor people's baskets and returned the baskets to their owners, their poverty would be on display for all to see, leaving them embarrassed. In accepting their entire offerings while taking only the fruits from the wealthy farmers, the Torah allowed those of lesser means to feel pride about the value of their contributions in the eyes of Hashem. Alternatively, **Rav Yaakov Neiman** answers that the wealthy farmers likely felt smug about their valuable baskets. Because Hashem detests arrogance, the Kohanim return their baskets to them. The minimal offerings of the poor farmers came from pure motivations and humble hearts, which are infinitely more precious to Hashem than gold and silver.

2) **Rav Moshe Shapiro** suggests that in the times of the Beis HaMikdash, they indeed expounded upon this pasuk as part of the standard text of the Haggadah. However, our goal at the Seder is not to discuss historical events that occurred in the past, but to view the events of the Exodus as if they happened to us. As a result, we cannot discuss the final pasuk in the section that focuses on the Beis Hamikdash, since we have not merited its rebuilding. He suggests that this explanation is alluded to by the Rambam, who begins his recording of the text of the Haggadah by writing, "This is the version of the Haggadah that Jews are accustomed to say while in exile."

3) **Rav Zalman Sorotzkin** explains that Moshe's arrangement was deliberate. Chazal say (Berachos 5a) that living in Eretz Yisroel is a gift that is only acquired through difficulties. Maintaining a positive attitude is essential to overcoming the inevitable setbacks. To convey this message, Moshe told the Jewish people that immediately after entering the land, they were to perform a ceremony that symbolizes remaining happy in the face of challenges and struggles, as they were specifically instructed to offer sacrifices and celebrate on the mountain on which they would accept the curses, not the blessings.

4) The plagues that are mentioned in the rebuke of Parshas Ki Savo are pestilence (Devarim 28:21), boils (Ibid., 28:27), and locusts (Ibid., 28:38).