



Ashreinu | אשרינו

ENHANCING YOUR STUDY OF THE WEEKLY TORAH PORTION

MAKING THE MOST OF YOUR INVESTMENTS

RABBI AVI HOCHMAN

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ADINA HIRSCH ('19)

BENNY FRANK ('21)

BATSHEVA SHEKHTER ('20)

ELISHEVA GREENE ('20)

People are committed to their investments. However, making the right investment is a tricky business. It can be overwhelming, intimidating, and scary.

To be honest, if it was easy, more people would do

it! It takes time, creativity, faith, and knowledge to really make the proper decision about your investment. Yet, in this week's parsha, we find an investment that truly pays. The Torah speaks of the mitzvah of bikkurim. The farmer comes to the kohen and the Torah tells us:

לְקַח הַכֹּהֵן הַטָּמֵא, מִיָּדְךָ; וְהִנִּיחוֹ לִפְנֵי, מִזְבַּח ה'

“And the kohen will take the basket from his hand, and place it before the altar of Hashem, your God” (Devarim 26:4).

The mishna (Bikkurim 3:8) teaches that poor farmers would give the kohen both their bikkurim fruits and the

simple myrtle baskets in which they brought the bikkurim, while the affluent farmers took back their baskets of gold and silver. The Malbim (Devarim 26:4) teaches that there is a significant difference between the baskets of the rich and the poor. The poor man, he postulates, wove the basket out of myrtle leaves specifically for this purpose. Since it is a labor of love, reflecting his personal mesirat nefesh for the mitzvah, the basket itself becomes an integral part of the mitzvah. The poor man, who toiled and gave of himself in making the basket, elevates the basket to become part and parcel of the mitzvah. It is for this reason that we honor the poor and the kohen keeps the basket in recognition of his noble efforts.

My rebbe, Rabbi Benjamin Yudin, explained that the Torah is teaching that when one invests in something, it becomes an integral part of him. The more time, focus, and effort you put into performing a mitzvah, the more you appreciate it and the more impact it has upon you.

This is a very timely message as we approach Rosh Hashana. We need to invest in our mitzvot.

The more we make the mitzvot our own -- by understanding them and performing them with love and excitement -- the more profitable our investment will become.

Robert Arnott, an American entrepreneur and investor, once said, “In investing, what is comfortable is rarely profitable.” In order to truly gain from our investments, we must go outside of our comfort zone and truly invest in creating a meaningful relationship with Hashem and His mitzvot.

SERVING HASHEM WITH JOY

ADINA HIRSCH ('19)

Parshat Ki Tavo concludes by mentioning all the blessings Bnei Yisrael will receive if they follow the Torah and all of the curses they will receive if they don't. Moshe describes all the terrible things that will happen as: diseases, enemies, failed crops -- basically a world of turmoil. Moshe then continues by giving an explanation for the cause of these curses. He says, “because you did not serve the Lord your God with joy and gladness of heart out of the abundance of all things” (Devarim 28:47).

Obviously, being unhappy is not a good way to go through life, but is it really so bad that it warrants curses? What's the big deal about not serving Hashem with joy? Shouldn't we be rewarded for performing the mitzvot and fulfilling our obligations, regardless of how happy we are to do so?

Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks explains that joy for the Torah is a communal effort; it's never simply an individual's personal feeling. He then goes to provide examples. A newly married man must stay home from battle for the first year in order to “bring joy to the wife he has married” (24:5). In the Beit Hamikdash bringing korbanot is intended so, “you and your families shall eat and rejoice in all you have put your hand to” (12:7). Holidays are considered joyous days because of their communal celebration; everyone gathers together in Yerushalayim. Any occasion of joy or simcha in the Torah is truly a shared experience.

This provides some insight into the reason why the Jewish people deserve to get cursed if they fail to serve Hashem with joy. Serving Hashem with joy and celebrating together is critical toward uniting the Jewish people. It is only with this unity that it is possible for the Jewish people to survive difficult times. Without communal joy, Bnei Yisrael lack the strength to maintain their faith in Hashem.

Rabbi Simcha Bunim explains this pasuk a little differently. Serving Hashem with joy means looking at the rules and mitzvot with the perspective of wanting to gain from them, rather than looking at them as a burden. We must view every religious opportunity as a gift, not as something we are forced to do. If people go through life with a negative attitude about Judaism, they will end up resenting Hashem and causing other people to turn away as well. This is why the Torah placed such severity on viewing Judaism as a burden by making it the cause of curses.

May we all serve Hashem in unity with immense joy and feel privileged that we get to partake in Judaism!

OVERCOMING THE YETZER HARA

BENNY FRANK ('21)

Inspired from Ata V'halevy V'hager

by Menashe Frank

In Parshat Ki Tavo, the curses Bnei Yisrael will receive for not following the laws of the Torah are listed, along with the reasons behind them. One of the causes of these curses is, “because you did not serve Hashem your God amid gladness and goodness of heart, when everything was abundant” (Devarim 28:47). The Kotzker Rebbe understands this pasuk to mean that one will be cursed for happily avoiding serving Hashem and enjoying his failure to keep the mitzvot. The Torah understands that sometimes we will struggle with keeping certain commandments and provides us with a system to do teshuva, but the main goal is for us to feel uncomfortable about failing to properly serve Hashem.

Earlier in Sefer Devarim, a description is mentioned of the process by which a soldier in a voluntary war can acquire a captive woman, known as eshet yefat toar. The captive woman must shave her hair, let her nails grow out, and try to look less attractive to make the man uninterested. After this process, if the man still desires the woman, he may take her through the steps of conversion and eventually marry her.

If we are supposed to be bothered when failing to keep the mitzvot, then why is there a process by which a person can violate a prohibition? Rashi comments on this idea by explaining that the Torah acknowledges the yetzer hara's ability to take over the man at the sight of this beautiful woman, and that he might give in to his inclinations. However, how could the Torah give the yetzer hara an opportunity to win? Shouldn't the Torah have

strict laws on issues like eshet yefat toar?

The Torah understands that Jews are all limited human beings who make mistakes and, therefore, it would never give a commandment that a Jew would be incapable of keeping. The Torah also recognizes that in certain limited situations, the yetzer hara is impossibly strong. In these special instances, a halachic and appropriate accommodation is made for those who can't handle the pressure of the yetzer hara. (Note: Appearances of certain cases that serve as compromises in Torah regarding the yetzer hara does not mean that one can make his own calculation as to whether or not he should follow specific laws because the yetzer hara is strong in that category.)

A person must try his hardest to fight his evil inclination, but in the rare situation when it is virtually impossible to overcome desire, the Torah recognizes it and creates a way to help those people in need.

KEEPING ALL THE MITZVOT

BATSHEVA SHEKHTER ('20)

Parshat Ki Tavo depicts the event at Har Eval and Har Grizim, where Bnei Yisrael were told the blessings and curses that they would receive based on their accordance to the laws of the Torah. The Torah first lists the curses that were delivered to the tribes of Reuven, Gad, Asher, Zevulun, Dan, and Naftali as they stood on Har Eval. The last curse states:

“Cursed should be the one who does not uphold the words of this Torah and observe them. And the entire nation should say, Amen” (Devarim 27:26).

אָרוֹר אֲשֶׁר לֹא יִקְיִים אֶת־דְּבַר יְהוָה הַזֶּאת לַעֲשׂוֹת
אוֹתָם וְאָמַר כָּל־הָעָם אָמֵן:

How can a person who does not keep all the mitzvot be cursed, if that person does not even have the resources to perform all 613 mitzvot? There are 30 mitzvot women cannot perform, 26 mitzvot that people in chutz la'aretz cannot perform, and 342 mitzvot everyone cannot perform because of the absence of the Beit Hamikdash. Even more so, the Gemara Shavuot explains that Bnei Yisrael accepted this curse with extreme certainty that they would be able to fulfill all of the mitzvot in the Torah, even though there was no way for this to be actualized!

Sforno explains that according to the Talmud, a person who refuses to observe certain laws that he is obligated to keep is considered a heretic. Based on this statement, he interprets the last curse to mean that an individual who chooses to ignore mitzvot that he finds meaningless, even though he is legally obligated, will be cursed. This curse would therefore not apply to those laws that one is exempt from.

Ibn Ezra takes a different approach and focuses on the fact that the previous curses were all directed towards individuals who violated negative commandments. He suggests that the last curse applies to those who violate the positive commandments that they are obligated in. Instead of listing many positive mitzvot that one would be cursed for not following, the Torah makes an all inclusive curse for this type of person.

The Ohr HaChaim focuses on the Torah's use of the phrase, “does not uphold,” in describing someone who does not keep the mitzvot. He claims that this refers to someone who does not take advantage of the opportunities given to him to do mitzvot. A person who refuses to take advantage of opportunities to perform mitzvot falls under the category of one who should be cursed for not keeping all the mitzvot.

Of the mitzvot that we are able to fulfill nowadays, some are mishpatim, mitzvot with understandable purposes, and some are chukim, mitzvot with unclear reasons. Even though we may not find meaning in every mitzvah that we are obligated to perform, it is our responsibility as Jewish people to take advantage of every opportunity we have to perform a mitzvah. To avoid falling under the category of the individual described in the curse, we must live our lives prepared and ready to fulfill any mitzvah that comes our way.

LEAVING EGYPT AND BIKKURIM

ELISHEVA GREENE ('20)

This week's parsha, Ki Tavo, discusses the laws pertaining to bringing bikkurim, the first fruits. After a person brings his crops to the Beit Hamikdash, the kohen then briefly overviews Jewish history, starting from Yaakov fleeing Lavan's house, and states:

וַיֹּצֵאנוּ ה' מִמִּצְרַיִם בְּיַד חֲזָקָה וּבְזַרְע נְטוּיָה
וּבְמַרְאָה גְדֹל וּבְאִתּוֹת וּבְמִפְתֵּיִם:

“And Hashem took us out of Egypt with a strong hand, by an outstretched arm and awesome power, and by signs and wonders”. (26:8)

What relevance does Yetziat Mitzrayim have to bringing bikkurim? Why is Yetziat Mitzrayim constantly referred to on multiple occasions throughout the Torah?

Rabbi Jonathan Sacks explains that Jewish history is not knowledge just for the elite; rather, it is accessible to every single member of the nation. By fulfilling the mitzvah of remembering Yetziat Mitzrayim, we connect ourselves to our lineage that has lasted for forty centuries. As mentioned in Masechet Pesachim, every individual must see himself as if he had left Mitzrayim in order to create a direct relationship with his nation's past.

The mitzvah of bikkurim started from Shavuot until Sukkot, when all of Bnei Yisrael would gather in Yerushalayim at the Beit Hamikdash. This communal event allowed for all of Bnei Yisrael to serve Hashem in an inclusive, accessible way. When we remember Yetziat Mitzrayim at the time of giving the bikkurim, we correlate the unity we are experiencing at the Beit Hamikdash to the unified history all Jews share.

As learned from the process of giving bikkurim in the Beit Hamikdash, the past of the Jewish nation is always important and relevant. However, we are also responsible, as one of the links in the mesorah, to constantly add to Jewish history. With Rosh Hashanah coming up, we should make it a priority this new year to take advantage of opportunities to positively influence our piece of the timeline of Jewish history.



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