

Summary

A. Bikurim. Moshe concluded the legal section of his discourse with an account of the ceremonies to be performed in Israel re: the Bikurim (the first fruits of the 7 “Minim” [species] brought to the Kohein in the central Sanctuary). The donor was then to recite a prayer of thanksgiving recalling how Hashem delivered his ancestors from Egypt and brought the new generation into a land flowing with milk and honey.

B. Ma’aser. The Ma’aser (10% of the crop) of the 3rd year of the Shemittah cycle was to be given to the poor, following which the donor would offer a prayer declaring that he had obeyed the commandment to set aside Ma’aser for the Levi, orphan and widow.

C. Several Ceremonies. Moshe and the Elders then instructed the people to observe several solemn ceremonies once they crossed the Jordan river:

1. they were to erect large stones on Mt. Eival, and clearly inscribe on them all words of the Law;
2. they were to build an altar of stones and sacrifice burnt and peace offerings thereon, the latter to be followed by a sacrificial meal of the peace offerings to be eaten in a joyful atmosphere; and
3. the acceptance of the Law was to be ratified by the Twelve Tribes as follows: six Tribes were to stand on Mt. Gerizim, representing the blessings; the other six Tribes were to stand on Mt. Eival, representing the curses. The Levi'im were to stand in the valley between the mountains and proclaim curses on those who performed the following sins (and blessings on those avoided them):
 1. idolatry;
 2. dishonoring one's parents;
 3. removing a neighbor's boundary lines;
 4. misleading the blind;
 5. acting unjustly towards the stranger, widow or orphan;
 6. behaving in an immoral fashion;
 7. murdering someone in secret;
 8. taking a bribe to give false testimony in a case involving capital punishment; and
 9. failing to observe the commandments in general.

The Tribes were to respond to each blessing and curse with “Amen” (“truth”).

D. The consequences of their behavior. The people had frequently been warned about the consequences of disobeying Hashem's commandments. As they were about to enter Israel, Moshe felt it incumbent upon him to place even greater emphasis on the results their future behavior would bring — if they observed Hashem's words, they would receive numerous blessings (e.g., prosperity, the subjugation of their enemies, etc.); the alternative would lead to disaster (e.g., disease, famine, death, being overrun by a cruel nation and scattered and again being enslaved).

E. The third and final discourse. Moshe began his third and final discourse, during which he appealed to them to remember Hashem, Who watched over them in Egypt, during their wanderings in the wilderness and Who would continue to protect them in the future.

A. Something to Say (R' Dovid Goldwasser)

1. Proper Kavanah (Intent). “I have not transgressed any of Your commandments and I have not forgotten.” Why the apparent redundancy? Obviously, one who has not transgressed has not forgotten. The S'fas Emes that sometimes we perform a mitzvah only out of habit, forgetting the reason behind it. While we perform the commandment, we lack the proper kavanah. Therefore, we declare in this verse that not only have we fulfilled the commandment but we have not forgotten its meaning.

2. A Silver Lining. “And it will be that just as Hashem rejoiced over you to benefit you and multiply you, so shall Hashem cause [them] to rejoice over to make you perish and to destroy you.” This verse seems to suggest that Hashem will, G-d forbid, cause rejoicing at the destruction of the Jewish people. How can this be? All punishment and suffering for our sins are not, G-d forbid, an act of revenge but are for our own good. Just as we are happy to see a clean garment after we wash our soiled clothing, so too there is happiness when we are “cleansed” from our sins. This explains G-d's happiness. He is happy to see His children as a “new garment,” cleansed from our sins. We know that when tza'ras afflicted a building, the affected bricks had to be removed. While this seems to be a punishment, many times hidden treasures were found as part of this process. Through the punishment, positive

results occurred. It is noted that the word “nega” (plague) has the same letters as “oneg” (delight), alluding to the idea that a seemingly negative experience can have positive results.

B. Soul of the Torah (Victor Cohen)

- 1. Educating Our Children.** “Gaze down from Your Holy abode, from the heavens and bless Your people Israel.” The Sifri commented that “He should bless His children with sons and daughters.” The author of Avnei Nazer noted that one fulfills the giving of the first fruits for Hashem’s sake, he not only brings the first mature “fruits” from the ground, he also his own produce – fruit from the womb. We must, during our children’s early years, instill holiness in them through thorough Torah education, bringing them closer to G-d. When this is done, we are blessed with sons and daughters who are blessings to their parents and the entire Jewish people.
- 2. Proclaiming G-d’s Name.** “Then all the peoples of the earth will see the Name of Hashem is proclaimed over you and they will be in awe of you.” R’ Baruch of Mizidaz notes that the nations of the world will revere G-d when they see that “you” (each of us) is proclaiming His greatness.

C. Torah Gems (Aharon Yaakov Greenberg)

- 1. The True Owner.** “You shall take of the first of all the fruit of the earth which you shall bring of your land that the L-rd your G-d gives you . . .” The concept of the bringing of the first fruits is to rid you of idea that it is your land and to bring you to the realization that it is the land that L-rd your G-d gives you. Akeidah.
- 2. Blessings Upon Us.** “And all of these blessings shall come on you and overtake you.” Sometimes, because of ignorance, we flee from that which is good for us simply because we don’t recognize its goodness. Thus, the Torah promises that these blessings will come on, and overtake, us. Degel Mahaneh Ephraim.

D. Rabbi Frand on the Parsha

- 1. They Will Reach You.** “And all of these blessings shall come on you and overtake (reach) you.” Is not the latter part of the verse redundant? Even if blessings come upon you, you will not be totally satisfied if you do not appreciate what Hashem has truly done for you. Only if they penetrate – they reach you – will you be considered truly blessed. The Beis Av applies this line of reason to curses as well. What good does it do if Hashem sends us hardships and difficulties to gain our attention and we fail to get the message? Rav Noach Weinberg once met a Jewish man and invited him to his yeshiva. “I don’t need a yeshiva,” the man told him, since “the L-rd and I are already tight.” “How do you know that?,” Rav Weinberg asked. The man explained that he had been driving on his motorcycle when a monster truck came at him head on. His bike went over a cliff and crashed in a ball of flames, but he was miraculously able to grab hold of a branch and walk away unhurt. Rav Weinberg nodded and said, “terrific story. The L-rd definitely put that branch there to save you. But, tell me – who do you think sent that monster truck?!” How often we all overlook the message in blessings and apparent curses?
- 2. Expanded Borders.** “And you will be only on top and not on the bottom.” One can’t be on top and on bottom on the same time. What, then, is the Torah teaching us? Rav Tzaddok HaKohein of Lublin draws attention to the prayer of Yaavetz, “if You will bless me and extend my borders.” Why does he ask for both a blessing and an extension? Rav Tzaddok explains that people may be given tremendous bounty, but if they are not equipped to handle it, it can destroy their life. Yaavetz thus asked that G-d “extend his borders” – make him a better and wiser person in order for him to be able to handle the blessing. How do we “expand our border”? By giving to our others – by giving our time and money to our others, by being attentive spouses, parents and children. The Talmud (Taanis 9a) states: “tithing in order to become rich”. At first glance, this seems to be some sort of segulah (charm). However, it is nothing of the sort. By tithing – giving to others – the bigger we become and the more we grow and, in turn, the more we are capable of handling wealth. May we all be blessed with being on top – being blessed with wealth – and not on bottom – having expanded borders with which to accept such blessing. possess within our souls.

E. Lilmode Ul’lamed (Rabbi Mordechai Katz)

- 1. Doing mitzvos quickly and eagerly.** “Vi’ata Hinei Heiveisi,” says the bringer of the first fruits. “And now, behold, I have brought.” Chazal tells us that the word “Vi’ata” means right away, the word “Hinei” signifies happiness, and “Heiveisi” indicates that one gives of himself. Therefore, the performer of this mitzvah, like the doer of any mitzvah, is indicating this willingness to perform Hashem’s law quickly, eagerly and selflessly. This is proper approach to all of Hashem’s commandments.
- 2. Ma’aser for the poor.** In this Parsha, the Torah reminds us that a tenth of one’s crop should be reserved the third year of the Shemittah cycle for the poor and needy. Once again, the Torah calls our attention to the plight of the destitute, and tells us that it is our obligation, we who have benefited from Hashem’s graces, to help them. One who contributes to charity shouldn’t think that he is losing through his donations, for he will actually gain in the long run. The rewards for giving Tzedakah are great. It is said that “Giving charity spares one from death.” Sometimes, the reward can come in unexpected ways, such as described in the following story. A certain man was so dedicated to giving tzedakah (charity) that he sold his own house to be able to continue doing so. Once, on

Hoshana Rabba, his wife gave him a few coins and told him to buy something for their children in the marketplace. While on the way there, the man met someone who was collecting money to clothe an orphan. The man readily gave away all the money his wife had given him. But then, ashamed to return to the children empty-handed, he searched for something he could take from shul, where he found some abandoned esrogim (the citron used on Sukkot) used by children for play. He collected a sackful and brought them home. It so happened that the man had to go overseas and while packing accidentally included the sack of esrogim. When he arrived at his destination, he heard that the country's king was suffering from a severe stomach ailment. The king's physicians decided that only the fruit of the citron could provide relief, but no one could secure such a fruit on short notice. It was then that the man discovered the esrogim in his bag. He brought them to the palace, and upon the king's recovery was rewarded handsomely for his contribution. The money he spent to aid the poor had been returned to him many times over. He indicated his gratitude by making a very large donation to those in need. Sometimes the reward for the charity-giver consists of the expressions of thanks offered by the recipients. However, one should be willing to give tzedakah simply because it is a mitzvah to do so.

G. Peninim on the Torah (Rabbi A.L. Scheinbaum)

1. Our joy. "And now behold I have brought the first of the fruit of the land which You have given me Hashem". Is there any doubt that he is offering his fruits to Hashem? HaRav Yoseph N. Kornitzer explains that clearly everything belongs to Hashem.

Consequently, what portion of our own belongings do we personally possess in mitzvos performance? We don't have possession of the actual mitzvah; however, there is a specific essential component of each mitzvah which is inherently ours — our sensitive involvement in its performance. The joy and enthusiasm which one applies to mitzvah performance is his part of the mitzvah. The Charity money, Tefillon and candles, for example, belong to Hashem; but the emotion, fervor and excitement in performing their related mitzvos belongs to us. It is this joy which give us "license" for their possession.

2. Serving Hashem with joy. "Because you did not serve Hashem with joy and gladness of heart." This suggests that the source of all punishment is serving Hashem without joy. Joy is an essential component of the service of Hashem. The Yalket Me'am Loez explains this ideal with a simple but profound analogy. A king had an uncontrollable son, whose unrestrained acts of self-indulgence were often a source of embarrassment to the king.

Whenever the king was about to punish him, the son would put on a sweet, angelic smile. When the king observed the happiness and sweet innocence in his son's eyes, it became difficult for him to execute his planned punishment. When Hashem sees the inherent joy and happiness emanating from our service of Him, He defers punishment. Even if one is intellectually aware of the value of Torah and a Torah lifestyle, he must nonetheless experience it through joy.

H. The Majesty of Man (Rabbi A. Henach Leibowitz)

Concern for the perpetuation of Torah. Moshe, at Hashem's command, gave a special Sefer Torah to the Levite Tribe. The other Tribes, upon hearing of this, became fearful, insisting that if Moshe gave the Sefer Torah to the Levite Tribe, their descendants would claim that the Torah was only given to them and not to all of the Tribes. This could lead to the Torah being lost from the Jewish people. Moshe had an unusual reaction to their complaints — he rejoiced! Moshe explained that until their complaint, he was unsure whether the Jews' devotion to Torah was complete. Now that he saw their concern about future generations, he realized that their devotion was whole-hearted for it evidenced a concern for the perpetuation of Torah even in the face of a remote possibility that might occur in the distant future. This is the supreme manifestation — the litmus test — of faith and devotion to Hashem. Personal piety isn't enough. One can't say that he truly values Torah if he doesn't appreciate the need to safeguard it for future generations and ensure the Jewish education of his children and fellow Jews. Rabbi Yaakov Emden notes that we have been privileged to see a miracle even greater than those witnessed at Mt. Sinai — the Torah has been studied and the mitzvos performed by Jews throughout history, for 3,000 years, through persecution and oppression. This is a miracle of the highest order.

I. Growth Through Torah (Rabbi Zelig Pliskin)

1. Be grateful for spiritual benefits before material ones. "And He brought us to this place, and He gave us this land, a land flowing with milk and honey". Rashi explains that "this place" refers to the Holy Temple in Jerusalem. Shouldn't the order of this verse be reversed, for the Jews entered the land much before they built the Temple? Rabbi Naftoli Tzvi explains that the Temple was a spiritual benefit and the land a physical benefit. We too should express our gratitude to Hashem in the same order.

2. Gain an awareness that all you have is a gift from Hashem. "And now I brought the first fruits of the land that Hashem gave me, and you shall place it before Hashem and you shall bow down before Hashem. Rabbi Chaim Shmuelvitz noted that we don't find the idea of bowing down to Hashem in other commandments. Why is it mentioned here? The concept of bringing the first fruits to the Temple was to show gratitude to Hashem for all that He have given. It is an expression our awareness that everything we have is a gift from Hashem. Therefore, the Torah mentions that we bow down to Hashem, symbolizing our total submission to His will, because all that we have is from Him. The greater our awareness that all we have is a gift from Hashem, the more we will appreciate it. As our

Sages point out, even a small gift from a important dignitary is precious; the greater the giver the more you treasure the gift. When you live with the realization that all you have is a gift from Hashem, you will enjoy immensely all that you have.

3. Rejoice with all the good that Hashem has given you. This a mitzvah — we are obligated to feel joy with what we are given by Hashem. Why do we need a directive to rejoice, since we should automatically be happy when we have good things? Man's nature is to constantly want more than he presently has. "He who has 100 wants 200" (Koheles Rabbah). Our moments of joy are mixed with sadness over what we lack. Therefore, the Torah commands us to rejoice over what we have, to strive to feel a joy that is complete. As Pirke Avos teaches, a wealthy person is one who feels joy with his/her lot.

4. When you are deserving of blessing, it will reach you even if you run away from it. "And it will come to you all of these blessings, and they will reach you, when you listen to the voice of Hashem". If the blessings will "come to you", why is it necessary to say "and they will reach you"? At times, a person doesn't realize what is truly good for him and he mistakenly runs away from the blessing. Therefore, the Torah guarantees that the blessing will pursue the person and reach him even though he is trying to escape from it. Only after he receives the blessing will he become aware of what is truly good for him. This idea saves one much suffering — when things happen that at first glance appear to be negative, be patient before making final judgment. As one event leads to another, you may see that what you thought was negative is clearly positive in the end.

5. When you worry about the future, you are needlessly causing yourself mental anguish in the present. "Your life shall hang in life before you, and you shall fear day and night, and you will have no assurance of your life." The Talmud explains that the: (a) first level refers to one who doesn't own land and buys a year's supply of grain each year; though he has grain for this year, he worries about the next year; (b) the second level refers to one who buys grains once a week; he is a worse situation, since he must find new grain every week; and (c) the third level refers to one who has to buy grain daily and constantly has something to worry about. Rabbi Chaim Shmulevitz cites this to point out that we create our own mental torture by our thoughts. If we have enough food for today, and can appreciate what we have, we are fortunate and will lead a happy life. If, however, we constantly worry about the future, we will never have peace of mind. Regardless of what will be in the future, we are causing ourselves suffering right now. Learn to have mental self-discipline — don't dwell on what is missing unless it can lead to constructive planning. Why cause yourself unnecessary pain and anguish when you can keep your thoughts on what you do have in the present? The Chofetz Chaim said that everyone has something to worry about; it is preferable for a person to worry about spiritual matters and then he will be freed from worrying about material matters.

J. Reflections on the Sedra (Rabbi Zalman Posner).

True Bikurim. Moshe tells his people that when they enter Israel, they are to take "the first of the fruits" and bring it to "the place that G-d will choose." This is the commandment of Bikkurim, the ceremonious bringing of the new fruits to Jerusalem. It is interesting to note that while the law of bikkurim stressed that the very first fruit to ripen be consecrated, there was no minimum quantity required. One grape or one fig could technically fulfill the letter of the law. How does this apply to us today? We all have our priorities. Some things are important; others are secondary. Some things are luxuries; others are necessities. Somewhere on the scale is our religious observance. Exactly what position on our "scales" does Judaism occupy? Bikurim is the first fruit. Before the Jew took care of his personal desires, he discharged his obligations to G-d. How much bikurim he gave was not important so long as it was his first. One of Rabbi Posner's Rabbis remarked about three people, one who studied Torah 16 hours a day, one only 15 minutes, and the third not at all. "Which two are closer to each other?" he would ask. Quantity is not the primary consideration. Even 15 minutes a day devoted to Torah study makes one a student of Torah, but those few minutes must have top priority, and then they are true bikurim.

K. Living Each Week (Rabbi Abraham Twerski).

Absorbing the tefillin. "And all the nations of the earth will see that the name of G-d is called upon you and will fear [revere] you." The Talmud states that "the name of G-d is called upon you" refers to the Tefillin of the head. Why is it, then, that although so many people wear the tefillin, they have not achieved the reverence of other people? Rabbi Levi Yitzchak of Berdichev suggests that the words of the Talmud must be scrutinized more carefully. The Talmud does not state tefillin that are "on the head," but "in the head." It is only if the messages inscribed on the parchments within the tefillin are absorbed and have been incorporated into one's mind that one can achieve the reverence of other people. These messages are the belief in the unity of G-d, the acceptance of serving Him with all one's heart, soul and fortune, even to the extent of yielding one's life to sanctify G-d's name, and the remembrance that G-d delivered us from bondage to make us truly free. Tefillin on the head refers to a rather superficial ritual and while it is a mitzvah is of limited value. Tefillin in the head is the ideal — it refers to integrating the tefillin within one's character, a sincere dedication and commitment to everything written in them, so that one's every thought and every act is processed through the principles of the four portions contained in the tefillin.