

Good Shabbos, everyone.

Mazel Tov to Jordan and Chana Leah Wiener on the bar mitzvah of their son, Yitzy. May you see much continued bracha from Yitzy and your entire family!

Thank you to the sponsors of this week's drasha:

- Jordan and Chana Leah Wiener, in honor of Yitzy's bar mitzvah. Mazel Tov!
- Jeremy and Devora Gradon, wishing all of Klal Yisroel *k'siva v'chasima tova*.

May Hakadosh Baruch reward them for their generosity and commitment to the shul.

Many people identify this *parsha* with the *tochacha*. These curses stand out because of their severity and because of the unique way they are read—quickly and in a low voice. They foretell what will happen if the Jewish people do not follow Hashem. But the Parsha does not begin with curses. Before we read the *tochacha*, we read about the *mitzvos* of *bikkurim* and *vidui ma'aser*. This sequence suggests that if we can get these *mitzvos* right, we can avoid the curses of the *tochacha*.

What is the fundamental lesson of *bikkurim* and *vidui ma'aser*? How do they protect from curses?

Let us first analyze the *mitzva* of *bikkurim*.

- (א) והיה כי תבוא אל הארץ אשר ה' אלקיך נתן לך נחלה וירשתה וישבת בה:  
(ב) ולקחת מראשית כל פרי האדמה אשר תביא מארצך אשר ה' אלקיך נתן לך ושמנת בטנא והלכת אל המקום אשר יבחר הק' אלקיך לשכן שמו שם:

This *mitzva* is directed to the Jewish people when they are living in their own land. Imagine a reality where they have developed their own booming economy and worldly culture, powerful army and luxurious lifestyle. Life is good. The crops are starting to grow. Within that reality, a farmer was told to take his first fruits of the *shivas haminim*, the seven species the Land of Israel is known for, to Yerushalayim and give them to the *kohanim* in the Beis Hamikdash.

The **Sefer HaChinuch** explains:

משרשי המצוה, כדי להעלות דבר השם יתברך על ראש שמחתנו, ונזכור ונדע כי מאיתו ברוך הוא יגיעו לנו כל הברכות בעולם, על כן נצטוינו להביא למשרתי ביתו ראשית הפרי המתבשל באילנותיו, that this *mitzva* is ultimately about *hakaras hatov*. It is designed to remind the farmer, especially at a time of great joy, that G-d is the source of all the good things in our lives. אשר ה' אלקיך נתן לך.

Similarly, **Rashi** comments on the declaration that the farmer would make upon bringing the first fruits:

ואמרת אליו — שאינך כפוי טובה:

You shall declare—that you do not lack gratitude to God.

There are many important lessons in this *mitzva*. One is the appropriate way to deal with success.

The **Mesilas Yesharim** writes that everything in life is a test and a challenge. He says poverty presents its challenges, which is no surprise. But he also says that wealth also presents its challenges, as one may feel independent of G-d.

ספר מסילת ישרים פרק א  
כי כל עניני העולם בין לטוב בין (למוטב) לרע הנה הם נסיונות לאדם, העוני מצד אחד והעושר מצד אחד כענין שאמר שלמה (משלי ל): פן אשבע וכחשתי ואמרת מי ה', "Who is the Hashem?"  
*lest, being sated, I renounce, saying,*

The Jewish people, when living in their own land (a privilege we must not take for granted), must always remember that Hashem is the source of their success. They must never imagine that, once they have their own country and economy, they no longer need Hashem. This struggle continues in the modern state of Israel. And the lesson applies to us in the Diaspora, as well. When things are comfortable, we, too, must never forget Hashem.

The **Sefer HaChinuch** continues

ומתוך הזכירה וקבלת מלכותו והודאתינו לפניו כי הפירות ויתר כל הטובה מאיתו יבואו, נהיה ראויין לברכה ויתברכו פירותינו.

*From this act of remembering Hashem, and accepting His Kingship, and acknowledging that everything comes from Hashem, we make ourselves worthy of receiving His bracha.*

In a similar vein, the **Rambam** in his *Moreh Nevuchim* associates this *mitzva* with the character trait of *anava*, humility.

ספר מורה הנבוכים חלק שלישי פרק לט  
אבל מקרא בכורים יש בו מדת ענוה ג"כ, שהוא לוקח סל על כתפיו ומודיע חסדי השם וגמולותיו להודיע לבני האדם.

The Torah instructs that—after the Kohen places the basket of *bikkurim* in front of the *mizbeach*—the farmer is to declare **ועניית ואמרת ארמי אובד אבי**....

Perhaps the Rambam's comment is rooted on in the unusual formulation "*v'anisa v'amarta*."

*Chazal* and *rishonim* struggle with the word *v'anisa*. Although it is usually translated as "to answer," this is puzzling because the farmer does not seem to be answering anyone's question.

The **Radak**, in his *Sefer Hashorashim*, notes that *anava* and *aniya* (the root of "*v'anisa*") have a common root. Thus, when the farmer brings *bikkurim*, he demonstrates *anava*, humility. He shows he understands that he is a recipient of G-d's goodness and mercy—and he is here to answer—to **recognize and respond to the gifts of life**. Hence, the verb **ועניית**.

Similarly, **Rav Hirsch**, (*Bamidbar*, p. 232) writes: **ענה** means to reply. In the social sphere **ענה** denotes complete dependence on the will of another. ענו וענוה denote the trait of complete selflessness.

Based on this understanding of *anava*, it becomes clear that the Chinuch's and the Rambam's explanations are related because there a connection between *hakaras hatov*, gratitude, and *anava*, humility. ***Anava is the characteristic of a person who lives a life of hakaras hatov.***

When we think of the word "humble," we usually conjure up an image of a self-effacing individual. Perhaps one with little self-worth, who doesn't think much of themselves and their potential.

**Rav Eliya Lapian** (*Lev Eliyahu*, volume 1) writes:

ענין ענוה אינו שלא ידע האדם ערך עצמו אל אדרבה צריך אדם לידע כחות נפשו ואעפ"כ לא יבא עי"ז לידי גאווה בהתבוננו האיך השתמש בכחותיו ובידעו כי אין אלו שייכים לו רק של שמים. . .

Humility is not the product of self-delusion—not realizing one's gifts and talents. Rather, it is the product of correct self-awareness—a recognition that these are gifts of G-d--*hakaras hatov*.

Humility is about perspective and context. Where did we get those gifts and abilities? Why do we possess them? How can they be used to be *mekadesh shem shamayim*? It's about recognizing Hashem as the source of all our gifts and living life with that recognition. In this way, an *anav* must be fully aware of his gifts, proud of his accomplishments, without being haughty in the least. This is the lesson of the connection of *anava* to *oneh*--to answering--to seeing ourselves as dependent on G-d--and understanding that our job in life is to answer His call. When we are aware of where things come from, we become more focused on our responsibility to use them properly.

As the **Mesilas Yesharim** explains regarding ways of avoiding haughty thoughts...

אלא אם יש בו חכמה רבה הוא מחויב ללמדה למי שצריך אליה, וכמאמר ריב"ז (אבות ב:ט): (אם למדת תורה הרבה אל תחזיק טובה לעצמך כי לכך נוצרת).

*Rather, if he possess great wisdom, behold, he is under duty to teach it to those in need of it, similar to the statement of Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakai (Avos 2:8): "if you learned much Torah, do not take credit for yourself since for this you were created!"*

אם עשיר הוא ישמח בחלקו, ועליו הוא לעזור למי שאין לו, אם גבור הוא לעזור לכושלים ולהציל לעשוקים.  
*If he is wealthy, he may rejoice in his lot, but it is incumbent upon him to help those who do not have. If he is strong, he must help those who are weak and rescue the oppressed.*

הא למה זה דומה למשרתי הבית, שכל אחד ממונה על דבר מה, וראוי לו לעמוד במשמרתו לפי פקודתו, להשלים מלאכת הבית וצרכיה, ואין בכאן מקום לגאווה לפי האמת.

*To what is this similar? To servants in a household where each one is charged with a matter and it is incumbent on each to stand on his appointed position to uphold the affairs and needs of the house. In truth, there is no place for pride here.*

By remembering and acknowledging that the first fruits and, really, all bounty comes from Hashem, and committing to use it appropriately, we connect to Hashem, pledging to be His messengers and to make ourselves worthy of His blessings, literally keeping the curses of the *tochacha* far away.

But what about *vidui ma'aser*? How does that complete the picture?

*Vidui ma'aser* is an unusual mitzvah, performed twice every seven years—in the third and sixth years of the seven-year *shmittah* cycle. *Vidui ma'aser* literally means, “tithing confession.” But this is not a confession in the usual sense. A farmer is obligated to travel to Jerusalem and publicly declare that he has fulfilled all his obligations regarding *terumos* and *ma'asros*, the various tithes of agricultural produce distributed to the *kohanim*, the *levi'im*, and the poor.

Commentators are bothered by the fact that Chazal refer to this declaration as *vidui*, confession. We usually think of confession as an admission of wrongdoing. **Rav Kook** (*Eyn Aya*, volume II, page 405) suggests that *vidui*, admitting, is not limited to confessing wrongdoing. He writes that it is true that we must always be ready to admit and confess our mistakes. An honest and critical self-image saves us from pretentiousness and arrogance, and helps us repent. We must continually try to improve ourselves and we need to be fully aware of the true extent of our moral and spiritual responsibilities and shortcomings.

However, Rav Kook writes, we must be careful not to be overly self-critical. We should not let this attitude deny us the joy and satisfaction in our accomplishments. For this reason, the Torah teaches that we should rejoice in our good deeds. We must learn to “admit” when we do things properly and correctly. This contentment bolsters our resolve in serving God, in performing

*mitzvos* and acts of kindness. The Torah teaches that it is proper and correct to be satisfied with our accomplishments, and not always regard our actions as flawed and inadequate.

In short, Rav Kook understands from *vidui ma'aser* that we need set times for regular *vidui*, to admit our mistakes and faults, so that we may refine our character traits and improve our actions. But we also need set times for a **positive *vidui***, to express our satisfaction and pride when we succeed in meeting our obligations and spiritual goals.

In a similar vein, the story goes that the Rebbe, **Reb Simcha Bunim of P'shischa** carried two slips of paper wherever he went, one in each pocket. On one was written: העולם נברא בשבילי—  
“*For my sake the world was created.*” On the other was written: ואפר עפר ואנכי – “I am but dust and ashes.” He would take out each slip of paper as necessary, as a reminder to himself.

That is the defining principle of *hakaras hatov* and *anava*. An honest perspective of who we are, celebrating what we have accomplished, acknowledging those who have assisted us, along with recognizing who has given us our talents and abilities and His expectations of us. And that is the perspective that will keep us focused on our mission in life, and keep the curses of the *tochacha* far away from us.

As we enter the week before Rosh Hashana, we should take stock of the past year and our lives in general. It has been a tough year, on so many levels. But within the challenge, we displayed much perseverance and much resilience. There were many things to celebrate and small miracles to acknowledge. It is also important to remember all the people who have helped us, the friends and family who were here for us, and all the blessings from Hashem that we sometimes take for granted, especially during a challenging year. In that *zechus*, may we keep *tochacha* far away and be *zoche* to a year of *bracha*, *hatzlacha*, and good health and the rebuilding of the Beis Hamikdash and a *k'siva v'chasima tova*...amen.