



Because Torah Is for Every Jew

Ki Savo 5776

September 23, 2016

A Taste of Torah

First Things First

By Rabbi Ari Aragon

Farmer Joe is walking through his field, inspecting all of his trees, when all of the sudden he sees something very exciting: The first fruits of the season are here! HURRAY! The Torah tells us that our dear farming friend has the opportunity for a very special mitzvah - *bikkurim*. He is told that he needs to take the first fruits of the Seven Species to the *Bais Hamikdash* (Temple), give them to the Kohen, and recount the entire story of the Jewish Nation's coming to the Land of Israel. Then the Torah says something amazing. "And you shall prostrate yourself before Hashem, your G-d." (Ki Savo 26:10) Not only is this the only time in the Torah that we find a mitzvah to bow to Hashem, but it is a simple farmer who is bowing before Hashem! How did the simple mitzvah of *bikkurim* elevate an unassuming agronomist to such high levels?

To answer, I would like to ask one more question on a very strange comment by Rashi. Rashi, on the very first words in the Torah, "*Bereishis bara Elokim...*" ("In the beginning of G-d's creating..."), quotes the Sages who state that the word *bereishis* doesn't only mean "in the beginning," but it also means "for the sake of the *reishis* (the first)". Who or what is this *reishis*? There are 3 opinions: the Jewish People, the Torah, and (surprisingly) *bikkurim*. While we understand the Jewish People and the Torah, what is the connection to *bikkurim* here?

Let's go back to our dear friend, Farmer Joe. What's his full story? Farmer Joe wakes up one morning to the wonderful smell of Folger's and hay. He observes the crisp morning sunrise and sees that today is the day he needs to begin planting, or else he and his family will have nothing to eat. Every day, for months, he works hard, sunrise to sunset, plowing through tough, hard land, planting seeds, pruning tree

branches, digging out deeply-rooted weeds, irrigating, fighting drought and infestation. The months drag on and the farmer worries. Maybe this time around, they're just not going to grow and ripen. Finally, early one morning, he goes out to inspect the crops and there he sees, nestled amongst the leaves, finally, the fruit of all his labors - HIS first fruit. As the weight of his livelihood slips off his shoulders, he smiles and whispers to himself, "This one is mine. The rest I'll give to Hashem, but this first one is just too special to me." And Hashem replies, "No, that's mine." When a person is able to give that fruit to Hashem, he instantly becomes closer to Him.

There are many things in life which we feel are ours, but there is no greater feeling of ownership than the feeling that we own ourselves. We will give Hashem our actions, even our cellphones for Shabbos, but our talents, individualities and personalities - those are OURS. But Hashem says, "No, those are actually mine." That's not to say that Hashem wants us all to become robots. In actuality, it is the exact opposite. Hashem desires that we be individuals, expressing our unique abilities and perspectives. However, He gave us the Torah and mitzvos so that our individuality could be defined, revealed, and expressed through the Torah. Each person has a unique opportunity to develop a personal relationship with Torah and mitzvos, and each person is given unique talents, personality, and character that he is able to cultivate and express only in the life of Torah and mitzvos. We have to seek out and find those things which are naturally buried inside our personalities that can connect us to the mitzvos, thus building our relationship with them. One could say that Hashem didn't give us mitzvos to develop our *bikkurim* - our unique talents and abilities - rather, He gave us

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Stories For The Soul

A Light in the Darkness

Chanukah was approaching in Bergen-Belsen, and there were prisoners who very much wanted the opportunity to fulfill the mitzvah of lighting the Chanukah lights. They managed to get ahold of some shoe polish, which was flammable, and pulled some strings from their clothing to use for wicks.

When the first night of Chanukah arrived, everyone gathered quietly around Rabbi Yisrael Spira (the Bluzhever Rebbe; 1898-1989) as he prepared to light the menorah. They all realized the danger they were in; if they were discovered by the Nazis, it could well cost them their lives. But their desire to be a part of the mitzvah overrode those concerns.

The Rebbe recited the blessings and lit the menorah. Since it was the first night of Chanukah, he recited the *shehechyanu* blessing, thanking Hashem Who had kept them alive to experience that moment.

One secular Jew, a former Bund leader, angrily asked Rabbi Spira, "How can you say such a blessing thanking Hashem for bringing us to this time? Can't you see what a terrible state we're in?! What are you thanking Hashem for?"

Rabbi Spira replied, "I was wondering the same thing. But then, I looked around and saw all these people who risked their lives to be a part of this mitzvah. When I saw all these Jews, eager to perform mitzvos, even in the worst of times, I recited the *shehechyanu* blessing to thank Hashem Who had kept me alive to see the greatness of the Jewish People."

Many years later, the man who had challenged Rabbi Spira sent him a message. "I gave your response a great deal of thought. It gave me the ability then to survive, and it gives me strength during times of adversity and distress."

Despite the many sufferings described in this week's parsha, the Jewish Nation has persevered and flourished, continuing its Divine mission.

Kollel Happenings

SYMBOLIC FOODS PLATTER FOR ROSH HASHANA

There is a widespread Rosh Hashana custom to eat simanim, foods that symbolize a good year. The Denver Community Kollel is proud to offer a simanim platter containing 10 items presaging a sweet, new year. For more info, or to order yours for just \$25, email info@denverkollel.org, visit the Kollel website at www.denverkollel.org, or call 303-820-2855. Be sure to leave method of payment and contact information. **Order deadline extended until September 25th.**

RABBANIT YEMIMA MIZRACHI ON SEPT. 28th

The Women's Division of the Denver Community Kollel and Aish Denver present a video for women, *Elul: Days of Preparation*. This Wednesday, September 28th, 8 pm at Aish Denver. Rabbanit Mizrachi is one of the most in-demand speakers today, attracting hundreds of women to her lectures, where she presents deep messages with a sense of humor. Sponsorship available. There is a \$5 charge to cover the cost of the event.

KOLLEL ANNUAL DONOR APPRECIATION EVENT SUNDAY, OCT. 9TH

The Kollel will hold its annual Donor Appreciation Event on Sunday, October 9th, 6:45 pm at the offices of Altura Periodontics, 3690 S. Yosemite St., Denver, CO 80237. For more info or to reserve, email info@denverkollel.org or call 303-820-2855.

Increase Your Jewish IQ

By Rabbi Yaakov Zions

Last week we asked: How many of our daily or Shabbos prayers follow the order of the *Alef-Bais* (Hebrew Alphabet)?

A: 1) In the blessings preceding the daily morning recital of *Shema*, a series of 22 words beginning "kail baruch." 2) On Shabbos, the "kail adon" which is substituted for the weekday "kail baruch." 3) *Ashrei* (*Alef-Bais* begins after the opening words, but omits the letter nun). 4) *Vidui* (confession), which many have the custom of reciting during the weekday *shacharis* prayers. (Some recite

it at *mincha*, as well). 5) On Shabbos in *Pesukei D'zimra* we recite *Tehillim* (Psalms) Chapter 34 (*Alef-Bais* begins after the opening verse). 6) In many communities, *Anim Zemiros* is recited on Shabbos, which (excluding the opening and closing stanzas) follows the *Alef-Bais*.

This week's question: The generally accepted custom is to blow 100 shofar-blasts each day of Rosh Hashana. Where and when did this custom originate? What alternate customs are there?

To submit an answer to Rabbi Zions, email ryz@denverkollel.org.

Lives of Our Torah Leaders

Don Yitzchak Abarbanel Part II

In 1481, King Alfonso died. Joao (John) II, the new king, passed laws limiting the rights of Jews in Portugal. He also accused the Abarbanel of plotting against him. The Abarbanel was made aware of the king's plans to arrest him, and he managed to escape to Spain in 1483, settling in Castille. The Abarbanel was greatly pained at the results of his years of loyal service to the kings of Portugal. He felt that perhaps he had put too much effort into serving a king of flesh-and-blood, and determined that, henceforth, he would devote more time

and energy toward spiritual matters.

The Abarbanel began writing his commentary to the Books of the Prophets. By 1484, he had completed his commentary on the books of Joshua, Judges, and Samuel.

At this time, his reputation in financial matters came to the attention of King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella of Spain. He was asked to help with the financing of their war against Granada, the last section of Spain still under Moslem control.

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our *bikkurim* to develop our mitzvos!

But using our talents for mitzvos means we need to focus on the mitzvah itself. For example, the natural relationship one has with Shabbos tends to be that it is a day to relax, spend time with family, enjoy good food, etc. These are all wonderful and important things, but we have yet to develop a relationship with Shabbos itself! Even though these things contribute to the Shabbos, they're still not what Shabbos is. To live Shabbos, the Shabbos itself has to be something we relate to, something that excites us, something that fits into our lives.

This is what it means to live life as a Jew - that the Torah and mitzvos are alive! That they resonate inside of our very personality, individuality, and character to the extent that one becomes "a living Sefer Torah!" The way we are able to get there is through the *bikkurim*. When Hashem gives a person *bikkurim*, things that one strongly identifies as "mine," then those very fruits are given to Hashem. That act of self-abnegation elevates a person, and he can be referred to as one who is close to Hashem. The Jewish People, the Torah, and *bikkurim* are thus all the illustrations of the ultimate closeness to Hashem.

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