

בס"ד

דברי תורה ד'צבי אליהו
DIVREI TORAH

כי תבוא

Ki Savo

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Learning to Learn

Rabbi Adam Singer

We are not always blessed with the best teachers. Each of us has probably come across the yawning high school teacher, the college professor who was so boring he watched the clock in his own class, and yes, occasionally, very occasionally, we find a Rabbi whose pedagogical skills may not be quite up to snuff. But consider the following: who will be more successful in life, the one who learns from all of the best teachers, or the one who learns from every teacher available to him? Certainly, the one who learns from everyone will be the one who will be the wisest and probably the most successful.

This week's parsha includes a message to grow from those who are around us, even if they are not the most illustrious sages who ever lived. The message is delivered in the context of a mitzvah for a farmer to take some of the first fruits which ripen in his field and present them to a Kohen in the Temple in Jerusalem. The verse states: "you shall take of the first of every fruit of the ground ... and you will come to the Kohen who will be in those days..." (Devarim 26:2-3).

Notice the subtlety of the verse where it says that you will come to the Kohen "**who will be in those days**". Rashi (11th century) asks why did the verse need to specify that you should perform this mitzvah with the Kohen who will "be in those days"? What other Kohen would be available other than the kohen available to "in those days" (i.e. a kohen in your generation)? Rashi explains that the verse

is teaching us that we must be satisfied with the spiritual leaders we have in our days. In his words, "you only have the Kohen that is in your days, as he is." We are not always blessed with the best role models, but we will grow most when we seek to be inspired and to learn from everyone around us, even if the person is not as great as those who may have come in the past.

There is a similar message from the teachings of our fathers (Pirkei Avos) which says "Make a teacher for yourself, acquire for yourself a friend, and judge everyone favorably" (Avos 1:6). The Maharal of Prague (16th cent.) points out several nuances in this Mishnah. First, what is the connection between the concepts of making a teacher, acquiring a friend, and judging everyone favorably? Why are they all mentioned in this Mishnah? Why does the Mishnah use the word "make" in conjunction with a teacher, and not "acquire" as it does in conjunction with acquiring a friend?

The Maharal explains that everyone you come across in life will basically fall into three categories: those you perceive as more wise than you, those who appear as wise as you, and those who seem to be less wise than you. The Mishnah teaches us how to relate to all three categories. We should learn from those who appear wiser than us, befriend those who appear to be of equal wisdom, and judge everyone favorably so that we can learn and enjoy friendship even from those we may think are less wise than we are.

What can we learn from the fact that the Mishnah told us to "make a teacher" rather

than to “acquire” or “accept” a teacher? The Maharal explains that the word “make” teaches us that sometimes we must exert our own efforts to learn from those who we may not want to learn from or may have difficulty learning from. Virtually everyone has something to teach us. Our challenge is for us to learn how to learn from them.

In these days before Rosh Hashonah, let us try to find the good points, the points we can learn from, in everyone around us. Take a moment this week and consider one thing you can learn from one person you did not consider before. You will be amazed at what you might discover.

May we all receive help from Heaven to learn and teach each other well so that all of us may reach our full potential. GOOD SHABBOS!!!



Humble pie is the only pastry that's never tasty.



Bikkurim: It's Our Whole Life

Reuven Formey

Parshat Ki Savo contains the mitzvah of Bikkurim, the bringing of the first fruits of one's produce to the Beit Hamikdash. This ceremony involved giving the fruit to a kohen, a waving service, and a declaration of thanks to G-d for the miracles He did for the Jewish people. The idea of praising G-d by dedicating the first and best of what we have to Him, permeates the very thought, speech, and action involved in this unique mitzvah. By acknowledging in our actions

that all of our sustenance, possessions, and sources of pleasure stem from the Creator, we become truly humble people, separated from the egotistical ideals that seem to dominate our world.

But the description of this wonderful mitzvah in the Mishnah raises a question. It explains that Bikkurim were to be brought in a very simple basket made of peeled willow twigs which was also given to the kohen. This low quality basket limited the amount of bikkurim that was brought to the Beit Hamikdash. We must understand. The mitzvah of Bikkurim was great, involving the bringing of the special seven fruits that Eretz Yisrael is blessed with to G-d's Holy House, calling out in immense gratitude to our Creator, and demonstrating that all praise is due to Him. It was a whole ceremony and celebration for the Jewish people. Therefore, how could we be told to bring these gifts to the Temple in a vessel of such simple quality! When one brings a gift to a king's house, he should bring it in beautiful gold and silver vessels, similar to the gifts of the princes of each tribe at the dedication of the Mishkan! But not only do we bring a simple basket to hold our gift, but its simplicity places a limit on the amount we can give. If we're going to give the best of what we have, why should the circumstances limit what we can bring!? Let's go all out! To answer these questions, we must know that beneath the surface the mitzvah of Bikkurim reflects the whole spiritual mission of the Jewish people. How so?

The Kabbalistic and Chassidic seforim tell us about the purpose of the soul coming into the world. The soul abides on a lofty plane before it descends down to the

physical world. But why would it need to come down here in the first place, being sent away from its spiritual paradise? It's because by being down here vested in a body, and refining the body's natural desire to serve itself and submit to its every mundane desire, the soul will be able to reach an even higher level of connectedness to G-d than before. It will have openly revealed how it is truly close to G-d by facing the test of doing battle with aspects of this world that were made to lure it away from G-d. When G-d sees that despite this challenge the soul makes great effort and is successful, it can then be elevated to a supreme status. But the reason this is possible is because of the lowly physical vessel, the body, which will be elevated by as well. Since it is because of the person's body, which studied Torah, ran to do so many mitzvot, and stayed away from prohibited things, that the soul can now reach its highest peak, the body is no longer lowly and grub! It will itself have been transformed from a simple container for the soul, into a holy item of spiritual splendor, which enabled even a holy soul to be elevated. How's that for physicality!

The same is true regarding the world as a whole. When each Jew does this above-mentioned service in their particular part of the world, refining the "body" of this physical realm through Torah and mitzvot, all of creation is elevated, including the angels and all the upper realms! But since our world is where the Torah was studied, the mitzvot performed, and the challenges overcome, it will have the greatest aliyah.

All of that sounds deep and wonderful, but what does that have to do with Bikkurim? Everything we've discussed is reflected in

this mitzvah! The basket, the vessel of lowly and simple quality, is the body. In the hierarchy of creation, physicality in its normal state is the lowest of the low. As for the bikkurim, the first and best fruits, they represent the soul that is placed in the vessel or 'basket' of the body. The Beit Hamikdash to which the fruits and the basket are brought represents the highest spiritual place that the body and soul can reach together as a result of divine service and offering their energies to G-d. So you see, our whole life's mission is reflected in the mitzvah of Bikkurim. G-d is telling us that the highest connection with Him can be revealed only by His "first and best", the souls of the Jewish people, being placed in low quality, bodily vessels. When the two team up, and manage to make their only focus the service of their Creator and revealing G-d in the world, they both become worthy of being "brought to the kohen" at the spiritual level of the "Beit Hamikdash", G-d's Essence.

Many people make the mistake of thinking that we have to be angels to become truly close to G-d. They think we have to possess vessels of shining gold and silver in order to be worthy in the eyes of the King of Kings. Their common saying is, "*What am I, an angel?*" or "*Hey, I'm no angel.*" No we're not...and we should thank G-d everyday for that, for angels don't have the Torah and free choice and therefore do not have the privilege of reaching new spiritual heights by learning and doing mitzvot. But we do. Therefore, it's our duty, and to our benefit to take the grub, food-eating, sweating, and sometimes lazy "willow-twig" of a body we've been given, offer its energies to G-d, and watch it illuminate the world exponentially more than any gold and

silver could possibly do. May Moshiach come and help reveal every level of that pinned-up illumination immediately!

(Based on the teachings of Rebbe Menachem M. Schneerson, zt'l)