

THE ACT OF INVESTING

by Rabbi Pinchas Avruch

Parshas Ki Savo

The Act of Investing

Rabbi Pinchas Avruch

After the Holy Land was conquered, farmers were obligated to bring Bikurim, the first ripened fruits, to the Bais HaMikdash (Holy Temple). Each farmer presented his basket of produce to the Kohen (priest) with a narrative that declared gratitude to G-d for His eternal role as the Guide of Jewish History. The pronouncement to the Kohen, spelled out in the Torah's text, started with a preamble, "I declare today to the L-rd, your G-d, that I have come to the Land that the L-rd swore to our forefathers to give us" (Devarim/Deuteronomy 26:3), after which the Kohen took the fruit and the narrative continued relating G-d's kindnesses throughout the centuries.

The glaring question inherent in the mandated text is that it was used year after year for centuries. Generations after the Children of Israel moved into the Land of Israel, they were still saying, "I declare today...that I have COME to the land..." Every Divine word of the Torah's text is deliberately included. How do we reconcile that the great grandchildren of the original wilderness wanderers stated that they just came to the land?

Rabbi Moshe Feinstein (1895-1986; Rosh Yeshiva/Dean of Mesivtha Tifereth Jerusalem in New York City; the leading Halachic/Jewish legal decisor and foremost leader of Torah Jewry of his time) explains that most places in the world are simply places to live. Eretz Yisrael is the exception; its holiness transforms its inhabitants and enables them to achieve a completeness of character unattainable in other environments. This personal perfection relates to our physical world with the inculcation of the truth that G-d's dominion is as absolute in the material realm as it is in the spiritual.

When the farmer chooses to ACT and gives "back" his precious first fruits - which to anyone else looks like any other grapes, figs or dates, but to him contain the significance of months of toil and great personal sacrifice and investment - to the Kohen, the messenger of G-d, he fulfills the purpose of Jewish life in the Holy Land. In G-d's eyes, the farmer's actions which concretize the axiom that G-d is the Master of the physical world - that all of the bounty is really a gift from Above and not a

"product" of our actions - satisfy the farmer's own purpose for being in the Holy Land. Thus, the farmer unequivocally declares that he HIMSELF has "come to the Land that the L-rd swore...to give us," in that his own deeds catapulted him to a higher, more complete spiritual plane.

The decision of the Sages to have this parsha read in these weeks is no coincidence. The Yomim Noraim (Days of Awe/High Holydays) are around the corner. We spend these waning days of the last Jewish month of Elul contemplating our relationship with our Creator, preparing for Rosh HaShannah, trying again to genuinely feel that He is our Father and our King. Without the Bais HaMikdash in Jerusalem, this mitzvah (Divine commandment) of Bikurim is not available to us. But there are countless mitzvah opportunities that G-d hands us almost every moment of every day. Chessed (acts of kindness), prayer and Torah study opportunities surround us. (Tzedaka [charity] is essential, but there must be more...the "People of the Book" cannot simply become "The People of the Checkbook"!) Our Jewish community is filled with chances to ACT, to DO something Jewish which concretizes our connection to G-d. Judaism has never been a spectator sport.

When we give of our valued assets - our money, our time, our selves - to foster our relationships with our spouse, children and friends, we do not call it a "sacrifice"; it is an "investment". The mitzvah of Bikurim and the High Holydays are our call to action to invest in our relationship with G-d.

Have a good Shabbos!

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