

RECOGNIZING HIS GIFTS

by Rabbi Pinchas Avruch

Parshas Ki Savo

Recognizing His Gifts

By Rabbi Elly Broch

"It will be when you enter the land that G-d your Lord gives you as an inheritance...that you shall take of the first of every fruit of the ground...and you shall put it in a basket...and the Kohen (priest) shall take the basket from your hand, and lay it before the altar of G-d your Lord." (Devarim/Deuteronomy 26:1-4)

After the landowner gave the basket of fruits to the priest, he thanked G-d for the miraculous history of the Jewish people, culminating with inheriting the fertile, fruit bearing Land of Israel. Although this gift appears to be a noble and humble act, it is quite striking to note the Medrash in Beraishis Raba (1:6): "In the merit of fulfilling the commandment of bringing the first fruits the world was created." What aspect of this commandment is so profound that the creation of the world was contingent on its fulfillment?

The Talmud (Brachos 4b) teaches that the Sages assured a share in the World to Come to anyone who recites Psalm 145 properly three times a day (it was included thrice daily in the liturgy as "Ashrei"). This psalm was given a special status because no other psalm possesses both of its virtues: the initials of the psalm's respective verses follow the order of the Hebrew alphabet and it contains inspiring testimony to G-d's daily mercy: "You open your hand and satisfy the will of every living thing." (v.16) In contrast, the Talmud also teaches that one who recites daily the group of psalms which combine to form the Hallel service is a blasphemer. The psalms of Hallel deal with praises for miracles and Divine protection our people enjoyed, such as the Exodus from Egypt. We recite this service on festivals and days that commemorate escape from calamity. Why is the daily recital of Ashrei encouraged whereas the daily recital of Hallel discouraged?

Rabbeinu Yona explains that while it is meritorious to recall past miracles and demonstrate appreciation for them, one should not however focus on past open miracles at the expense of

appreciating the subtle miracles we enjoy daily. We are instructed to recite Psalm 145 daily because it reminds us that we have to gain awareness of G-d's mercy not only through the miracles and testimonies enumerated in the Torah but also through investigation of the natural, mundane and seemingly automatic workings of nature. Due to habituation it is all too easy to take nature for granted. However, closer consideration of the plan and purpose evident in fruit production - such as the fruit's waterproof protective wrapper (the skin), the change of color indicating that it has become ripe to eat and the seeds inside to perpetuate the species - can prevent this misconception and remind us of our Creator's constant benevolence.

One of the primary purposes of creation is our recognition that the world has a Creator who constantly showers us with gifts, whether it is our delicious food, our precious health or our dear family. The commandment to bring the first fruits to G-d's Sanctuary awakens and reminds us that life and the world around us are Divine gifts not to be taken for granted.

Have a Good Shabbos!

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