

ALL THAT WE HAVE IS FROM HASHEM

by Rabbi Yisroel Ciner

This week we read Parshas Ki Savo. "And it will be 'ki savo' [when you will come] to the land that Hashem, your G-d, has given to you as your portion and you will inherit it and dwell there. And you will take the first fruits of the land that Hashem has given you and place them in a basket. [26:1-2]"

These first fruits, the bikurim, were brought to the Beis HaMikdash [Temple] where they were presented to the Kohen [priest]. After the season of backbreaking work, toil and hardship had yielded these first, precious fruits they were lovingly brought as an offering before Hashem. The bikurim demonstrated the Jew's passionate conviction that ultimately, it isn't one's hard work that produces results but rather the blessing of Hashem.

This humbling understanding of wealth--how, with the wrong understanding, it can harm its proprietor and the sensitivity that must be shown to those who don't have--resonates throughout the parsha of the bikurim.

"And the Kohen will take the basket from your hand. [26:4]"

The Talmud [Bava Kamma 92A] points out that this seems to support the well-known saying of their day that 'poverty follows poverty.' We have a similar saying that 'the rich get richer.' The passuk stated that the Kohen would take the basket along with the fruits. The rich would bring their bikurim, not in baskets but in gold and silver vessels--these were emptied and returned. The poor, however, would bring their bikurim in baskets. These were taken along with the fruits and not returned to their owners.

A number of explanations are offered as to the reason behind this seemingly strange law.

The Darchei Mussar writes that the rich, while bringing their bikurim in fine gold and silver vessels, were feeling pretty high and mighty. A bit full of themselves. In the state of such a mindset, their vessels could not be accepted as part of the offering. The Kohen was, in effect, telling them 'we don't need your money.'

The mindset of the poor, however, was quite different. With humility and a genuine want to give, they offer their bikurim to Hashem. As such, even the basket became sanctified along with the fruits and they were together accepted as an offering.

The Lev Aharon offers a different explanation. The wealthy would bring an assortment of the rich, beautiful fruit produced by their lush and fertile fields. These fruits would be removed from the

vessel which was then returned. The poor, however, would offer the few, scraggly fruits that they had managed to eke out from their simple field. Were the Kohen to empty their fruits from their basket, they might feel embarrassed of their paltry offering. The Kohen therefore accepts the fruit while still in the basket as their offering.

It isn't easy to stay attuned to the feelings of those who might have less than us. During my trip this past summer I stayed in a community which was graced with some pretty amazing houses. Walking one Shabbos we came across a beautiful house sandwiched between two absolute mansions. I commented that I felt bad for the owner of the middle house. The poor guy had spent hundreds of thousands of dollars to buy himself a beautiful house and then, from whichever direction he approaches it, he feels as if his house is a bit too small...

The bikurim lesson--all that we have is a gift from Hashem--helps safeguard a person from brazenly displaying his wealth and will sensitize him toward those that Hashem hasn't showered wealth upon to the same degree as he.

Rav Sholom Schwadron zt"l, the Maggid of Yerushalayim, was well known for the inspirational talks he would give all over the world. He personally lived in an incredibly modest way due to his refusal to accept payment for any of his speeches. Until the end of Rav Sholom's life, he did not own a refrigerator and running water did not exist in his apartment; the water they used was drawn from a well near the window.

Despite his personal circumstances, Rav Sholom loved the mitzvah of giving tzedakah [charity] with all of his heart. A son-in-law related the following incident which I saw in the biography about Rav Sholom, Voice of Truth.

One erev Yom Tov [eve of a holiday] he arrived at Rav Sholom's house to spend the holiday with him. A few moments later he heard a knock on the door; a poor man was standing in the entrance.

He was further in the house when he heard a soft cry and saw one of Rav Sholom's daughters wringing her hands. "Look what Abba [father] is doing! Why is he doing that? Come see what Abba's doing!"

The son-in-law came to the front door where he saw Rav Sholom unfolding a brand new shirt before the poor man's happy eyes. He had purchased the shirt in England and had it in his closet for the past four months, waiting to open it to honor the holiday.

After he had shown the poor man how beautiful it was, he refolded it and returned it to its wrapping. "Take it! You should have a new shirt. Good Yom tov!"

Turning back inside after the poor man had left with his new shirt, Rav Sholom's daughter turned to him. "Abba! If you had no money to give him and had to give him a shirt, why give him the beautiful, new shirt from England? Why?"

Rav Sholom saw their pain and was silent. He then removed a volume of the Rambam {Maimonides} from the bookshelf and began to read. "One who wishes to offer a sacrifice should bring of the best quality of the type he is offering. This is the law with everything. If one builds a house of prayer, it should be more beautiful than his dwelling. When feeding the hungry, he should give of the best and sweetest food from his table. When clothing the naked, he should offer his nicest clothing."

As Rosh HaShanah--the awesome Day of Judgment--draws near, we must have a clear perspective of who we really are without being misled by what we have. Humbly sharing with others, elevating ourselves to the level of that bikurim-basket, thus being sanctified and accepted as we offer our accomplishments before Hashem.

Good Shabbos,

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