

WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL ABOUT THE "FIRST FRUITS"?

by Rabbi Yissocher Frand

These divrei Torah were adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Tapes on the weekly portion: Tape #204, Giving a Sefer Torah To a Non-Jew. Good Shabbos!

What's The Big Deal About the "First Fruits"?

This week's Parsha contains the Mitzvah of Bikkurim - the Mitzvah of bringing the first produce from one's crops to Jerusalem. There was a tremendous fanfare associated with the process of bringing the First Fruits to Jerusalem. [Bikkurim Chapter 3]

The Mishneh tells us that as Jews from the towns and farms made their journey to Jerusalem, carrying the Bikkurim, delegations of elders from the cities on the way would come out to greet them with praises and psalms to G-d. When they would reach the gates of Jerusalem, additional verses and praises were recited. It was an elaborate ceremony.

During the course of the year, other things were brought to Jerusalem (e.g. -- Ma'aser Sheni, the second tithe). There were also other gifts that were brought to Jerusalem to be given to the Kohanim. But we do not find anything akin to the fanfare that was made for those who brought up Bikkurim.

The Holy Alschich asks, "What is the great tumult about a bit of fruit that may be worth less than half a dinar?" In other words, what's the big deal?

To strengthen his question, the Alschich quotes a very famous Medrash from the beginning of Sefer Bereishis. "In the Beginning (B'Reishis) G-d created..." There are many Rabbinic opinions about the word "B'Reishis". One of the opinions is that G-d created the world for the sake of Israel, which is called "Reishis" (the First one). But another opinion is that G-d created the world for the sake of Bikkurim which are called "Reishis" (the first ones). The entire universe was created just so that the Mitzvah of the First Fruits could be fulfilled. Again the Alschich asks, "What's the big deal about Bikkurim?"

Bikkurim does not usually make one's list of "The five most important Mitzvos in the Torah." And yet,

the Medrash in Bereishis lists Bikkurim as the cause for the creation of the whole world!

The Alschich explains that Bikkurim represents two fundamental principles that are essential to what Judaism is all about.

A person plants his crops. Farming is one of the most difficult professions in the world. It is hard, backbreaking work. One plants in the spring and he does not know what is going to happen to his crop. There can be droughts, floods, and pests. Everything can go wrong and so often it does. Here we have a person who was successful and who has a bountiful crop in front of him. It is very easy for such a person to think, "MY strength and the power of MY hand, made me this great wealth" [Devorim 18:17]. I am smart. I toiled. Now I see the fruits of MY labor.

Bikkurim comes to counter-act such thoughts. Bikkurim come to teach that it is G-d's land, it is G-d's sustenance, and it is G-d's Hand who has given us the power to gain wealth. A person must appreciate this and recognize the favor.

Bikkurim is about appreciating Who it really belongs to and about appreciating Who really gives us our sustenance. These concepts are foundations and fundamentals of the Torah. That is why this mitzvah of Bikkurim is so special.

A person must realize that it is not his brains, talents, or cleverness that help him acquire wealth. Rather it is his "Siyata D'shmaya" (help from Heaven). It is his "Mazal" (fortune) that G-d decides to be kind to him.

"Getting The Message" of the Blessings and the Curses

A series of Blessings are mentioned in the preface to the Tochacha. The Torah says, "And these Blessings will come upon you and they will reach you (v'hisigucha)" [Devorim 28:2]. Virtually all of the commentaries are bothered by the expression "v'hisigucha". Would it not have been sufficient to say, "All these Blessings will come upon you?"

What does "v'hisigucha" (they will reach you) add to this verse? We have spoken about this question in past years. This year, I will present an answer from the 'Beis Av', Rav Schlessinger.

The pasuk in Parshas Bechukotai tells us, "And you will eat your bread and be satisfied" [Vayikra 26:5] Rash"i there cites a Toras Kohanim that explains the brocha "One will eat a little bit and it will be blessed in his intestines." That means the blessing is that one will be psychologically satisfied even though he has physically consumed a small amount.

This is the ultimate blessing -- to be satisfied and to realize that one has been blessed is the Blessing of all Blessings. Sometimes G-d can shower us with all types of good and riches -- health, family, and wealth -- but if a person does not realize it, if he is never happy, if there always needs to

be more, if there is a constant chase, then what good is the blessing? It is meaningless!

A person can be impoverished. He can eat just a little bit (as the Toras Kohanim states) and if he is satisfied with it, then he has everything. On the other hand, a person can have fortunes and success, but if he doesn't realize that he has a bracha, then he is a poor man.

The pasuk says "Open Your Hand, and satisfy all life, with will" [Tehillim 145:16]. We say this pasuk (in Ashrei) three times a day. We understand the words "Poseach es Yadecha, u'Masbia l'chol chai" (Open your hand and provide sustenance for all life). But what is the meaning of the word "Ratzon" (with will)? "Ratzon" is that the recipient will be happy with it, not only physically satisfied, but psychologically satisfied, as well.

That too, is what the blessing referred to earlier is about. "And all these Blessings will come upon you...". Fine, but that is not sufficient. "...and they will reach their purpose (v'hisigucha)." -- the recipient will be happy with the Brocha, with the blessing. He will realize that it is a blessing. Without that realization, one has no Brocha.

With this explanation, Rav Schlessinger, also explains the parallel usage of this word later in the parsha [Devorim 28:15] "... and all the curses will come upon you, and will reach you (v'hisigucha)." What does that mean?

That "v'hisigucha" means the same thing. Sometimes a person can have misfortune and he doesn't even realize it. He doesn't realize what is happening to him. He doesn't realize how far he has gone. The curses don't even work! Because he doesn't "get it." He misses the message of the curse. That is the meaning of "v'hisigucha" in this context -- "the curse will reach you." Rav Noach Weinberg tells a story about a long-haired, "hippie" sort of fellow who walked into his Yeshiva with long hair and the typical accompanying mode of dress. He told Rav Noach, "I don't need a Yeshiva, because G-d and I are like this (as he showed his fingers twisted together to represent a 'twosome')!" Rav Noach asked, "How do you know that you and G-d are like 'this'?" The student responded that he was riding his bike along a mountain road and a truck came along, veered toward him, forcing him off the cliff with his bike. He saw himself going down the tremendous embankment and visualized that the end was at hand. All of a sudden, he saw a branch hanging out of the mountain. He reached out and hung on, and was saved, walking away without a scratch. "That's how I know," he said, "that me and G-d are like 'this'!" Rav Noach then asked him, "Did you ever think about why the truck knocked you off the cliff? Maybe *that* is what G-d is trying to tell you." This was a person who unfortunately experienced a negative incident - he seemingly received a kelala - but the message did not reach him. There was no "v'hisigucha". He didn't "get it." He missed the message. We must "get the message" from any punishment like he needed to "get the message" from the incident. The whole incident accomplished nothing. The blessing of "v'hisigucha" is that when the blessing comes, we should have the blessing of being satisfied and when the punishment sometimes, Heaven forbid, must come, let us not miss that message, either. Let us hear what the Ribbono shel Olam is trying to tell

us!

Personalities & Sources:

Alsich -- Rav Moshe ben Chaim (1521-1593), Safed. Authored Torah commentary Toras Moshe, first published in Venice 1601.

Rav Schlessinger -- Contemporary Rosh Yeshiva, Israel.

Rav Noach Weinberg -- Contemporary Rosh Yeshiva (Or Sameach), Israel.

Glossary

Bikkurim -- First Fruits

v'HISIGucha -- and it will REACH you

Beracha -- Blessing

Kelala -- Curse

Ribbon shel Olam -- Master of the World

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