

THE BASKET TOO HAS HOLINESS

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 # 604, Reading the Tochacha. Good Shabbos!

The Basket Too Has Holiness

The parsha begins with the mitzvah of 'Hava'as Bikkurim.' There is a positive Torah commandment for a person to bring his First Fruits up to the Bais HaMikdash [Temple] in Yerushalayim [Jerusalem]. He presents the First Fruits to the Kohen and recites a special text.

The Mishneh in Tractate Bikkurim describes in great detail the tremendous procession of the people who would come up to Yerushalayim with their first fruits in their baskets or trays. The Torah writes [Devorim 26:4] "And the Kohen will take the vessel from your hand and leave it before the altar of the L-rd your G-d." On this pasuk [verse], the Sifrei comments that the Bikkurim required delivery in a "vessel". The Mishneh notes that the "vessel" of rich individuals would be trays of silver or gold while the "vessel" of the poor people would be reed or wicker baskets. Furthermore, the Sifrei writes, the reed or wicker baskets would be given to the Kohanim (to keep) "in order to bring merit to the poor people."

[There are two textual readings of the Sifrei. One is "L'zakos matanah l'kohanim" -- in order to give the gift to the priests. The other reading, which the Malbim says is the correct reading, is "L'zakos l'anyiim" -- to bring merit to the poor people.]"

The Gemara in Bava Kama [92a] comments that the gold and silver trays which were used as delivery vessels by the rich, were returned to them. However, ironically, the reed or wicker baskets, in which the fruits of the poor were delivered, were kept by the Kohanim. The Gemara cites this as an example of the principle that "poverty follows the poor".

Why in fact was this done? The last thing one could accuse the Torah of is being insensitive to the needs of the poor! Why then does the Torah sanction returning the trays of the rich and keeping the baskets of the poor?

The Malbim offers the following interpretation. The reason why we do not return the baskets to the poor people is -- as the Sifrei itself comments -- "to bring merit to the poor." It is a privilege for the

poor person that the Kohen keeps his basket. Where does he get his basket? He collects the reeds by hand and manually weaves them into a basket. Not only are the Bikkurim the fruits of his labor, even the basket itself has personal importance because it is made with his own sweat and toil.

The rich person, who can afford gold and silver, did not work personally to mine and shape these metals. He simply bought a gold tray. In the case of the wealthy, there was absolutely no holiness to the tray, because it did not represent his labor. In the case of the poor, however, even the basket has certain holiness to it by virtue of the poor person's toil. Therefore, the basket becomes part of the Matnos Kehuna. Giving up the basket is not an embarrassment for the poor person. It is a privilege. It is making a statement that the Torah greatly appreciates his effort and his toil.

This is the intent of the words of the Sifrei -- "the basket of the poor is kept to bring merit to the poor person."

Purim Behavior May Be More Revealing Than Neilah Behavior

The Parshiyos we are currently reading -- Ki Savo, Nitzavim, Vayelech narrate the events during the final days of the life of Moshe Rabbeinu. Towards the end of the Parsha, the pasuk says, "Moshe summoned all of Israel and said to them: 'You have seen every thing that Hashem did before your eyes in the land of Egypt, to Pharaoh and to all his servants and to all his land - the great trials that your eyes beheld, those great signs and wonders.'" [Devorim 29:1-2] This is followed by a puzzling pasuk: "And the L-rd has not given you a heart to understand and eyes to see and ears to hear until this very day." [Devorim 29:3]

To what is Moshe referring? What is the missing wisdom and lack of understanding that were so evident amongst the children of Israel until "this very day"?

Rashi explains that on this day, Moshe Rabbeinu wrote and gave a Sefer Torah to the Tribe of Levi. Representatives of all the other tribes appeared before him in protest and demanded: "We too were present at Sinai. We too accepted the Torah. We too are deserving of our own copy of the Sefer Torah. Why do you allow your own tribe to be owners of the Torah? Maybe one day they will deny the Torah was ever given to us."

Rashi notes that Moshe rejoiced over this reaction. Concerning this reaction he commented, "This day you have become a nation." Today I recognize that you are desirous of clinging to the Almighty.

Rav Baruch Eizrachi has a problem with this Rashi. This claim of the other tribes is a ridiculous claim. It is childish. It is reminiscent of juvenile complaints to parents in sibling rivalries: "We want the same thing Levi has!" It is ludicrous to suppose that the Tribe of Levi would one day try to deny that the other tribes received the Torah as well. It is irrational!

Why then did Moshe Rabbeinu become so happy? Why did this enable Moshe to say "Today I know that you want to cling to the Almighty?" What does this mean?

Rav Ezrachi explains that when we really want to judge a person, it is best not to judge him by the way he acts at Neilah (at the end of Yom Kippur). It is better to judge him by the way he acts when he is drunk on Purim. When people get drunk on Purim, they sometimes say ludicrous things, ridiculous things. But when a person is not on guard, sometimes one can see the true person from his infantile reactions. The fact that Klal Yisrael was so offended and so concerned that "they got a Torah and we did not get a Torah," says something about them. This was not a prepared remark. This was not a coached response. That was a gut reaction -- the essence of the person was speaking. It was unrehearsed, unpolished, non-varnished, and non diplomatic. But this juvenile cry of "me too!" spoke volumes.

Of course, it was a ridiculous claim. But the fact that it bothered them to such an extent, gave Moshe the best indication that deep down, the essence of the Tribes were individuals seeking out closeness to the Torah and closeness to the Ribbono shel Olam. When Moshe saw this, he rejoiced.

This week's write-up is adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Torah Tapes on the weekly Torah portion. The halachic topics dealt with in the portion of Ki Savo in the Commuter Chavrusah Series are the following:

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