

THE GAIN IS PROPORTIONAL TO THE PAIN

by Rabbi Yissocher Frand

Parshas Ki Savo

The Gain is Proportional to the Pain

These divrei Torah were adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Tapes on the weekly portion: CD #868 Loshon Horah Vs Lying - Which Is Worse? Good Shabbos!

Parshas Ki Savo begins with the chapter of 'Mikra Bikurim' (reciting the declaration of the first fruits). As soon as the crops began to bud, each farmer marked the first fruits with a string or a ribbon so that when they were fully ripened, he would be able to recognize them and bring them as his 'First Fruits' to the Bais HaMikdash in Yerushalayim. The Mishna in Tractate Bikkurim describes the great pomp and circumstance surrounding the journey to Yerushalayim by the farmers with their first fruits. This was done on an annual basis. The farmers would bring the first fruits to the Kohanim and would read the chapter of 'Mikra Bikurim' [Devorim 26:1-11].

The Medrash Yalkut Shimoni [Chapter 27] states that when a person would bring his first fruits to the Kohen, a Heavenly Voice (Bas Kol) would come forth and miraculously announce "next year you will merit to perform this ritual again."

The Sefas Emes, in the Likutim of Parshas Ki Savo, asks a very interesting question: How did anyone ever die in the time of "Mikra Bikurim"? If every year the farmer was given a Heavenly Guarantee that "next year again" - how could such an annual blessing ever fail to come true?

The Sefas Emes answers his question based on the principle of "l'fum tza'ara agra" - the harder it is to do a mitzvah, the greater the reward. Two people can do the exact same mitzvah but one person will get greater reward for the mitzvah than the other by virtue of the fact that there was more trouble and effort involved on his part to accomplish this mitzvah. One person can hear shofar because he has a shul down the block from where he is. A second person lives in a small town and has to pack up his family and stay in a Holiday Inn with makeshift eating arrangements over Rosh Hashannah so that he can be at a minyan where shofar is blown. The latter fellow will get a greater reward for the same mitzvah than the former fellow.

The Sefas Emes writes that the blessing of the Bas Kol "May you do this again next year" was because the mitzvah of bringing the First Fruits to Yerushalayim involved significant effort. Unlike the Second Tithe, where it was not necessary to transport the produce to Yerushalayim (a person could redeem it for cash and take the money to Yerushalayim for the purchase of food there), a person had to carry the heavy baskets of fruits all the way. For this very reason, the Rabbis introduced the pomp and ceremony to encourage people to make the effort - recognizing that indeed "it is a big deal!"

But, says the Sefas Emes, the year after a person received a Bracha, it was not such an effort. The blessing in effect "put winds in a person's sails" and made the effort much easier to accomplish. So, the Sefas Emes writes, the blessing of the Bas Kol did not come every year - it only came every OTHER year. The next year when you brought the Bikkurim without a blessing, it was harder, so you needed a bracha to encourage you to accomplish it the following year. And so it went - the blessings were only given on alternate years. Consequently, writes the Sefas Emes, the farmer could only die in the alternate year following the time he did not receive the blessing of "may you accomplish this once again next year!"

This is a cute 'chap', but the real lesson here is the lesson of "the reward is according to the effort". Some people can open a page of Talmud and can go through it like someone reads an article in the newspaper. Some people have to look up the meaning of every Aramaic word and it becomes very difficult and frustrating. Two people can learn the same page of Gemara, for one it will take 20 minutes and for one it will take 1 hour and 20 minutes, but l'fum tza'ara agra and that is the way it is with every mitzvah. Let us remember this when we sometimes find it difficult to accomplish certain mitzvahs: The gain is proportional to the pain.

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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