

# PARSHAS KI SAVO

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## *Ki Savo, 5631*

The Sfas Emes takes as his initial text the following pasuk (Devarim, 26:16): "Ha'yom ha'zeh HaShem Eloke'cha metza'vecha la'asos es ha'chukim ha'eileh ..." ("Today, HaShem, your G-d, commands you to do these decrees ...").

This pasuk leads the Sfas Emes to draw our attention to the first paragraph of Medrash Tanchuma on the parsha. That Medrash starts with the pasuk just quoted; but then veers off in a totally unexpected direction. Here is the Medrash. You can see why I describe it as going off in a surprising way.

"The pasuk in Tehilim (95:6) says: "Bo'u nish'tacha'veh ve'nichre'ah ..." (ArtScroll: "Come! Let us prostrate ourselves and bow ..."). Moshe foresaw that with the destruction of the Beis HaMikdash, the mitzva of bikurim would come to an end. To deal with that situation, Moshe established the practice of tefila (prayer) three times daily."

I find this statement -- and its place in a logical flow of ideas -- incomprehensible. The Sfas Emes may have felt initially the same way; for he soon brings up reinforcements to help us. Thus, the Sfas Emes tells us his grandfather's comment on this Medrash. The Chidushei HaRim remarked that the mitzva of tefila resembles the mitzva of bikurim. How? Because the season's first fruits are the fruits for which the farmer has been yearning impatiently. Hence, the mitzva of bikurim involves denying oneself the joy of eating those much desired fruits, and instead, symbolically giving them to HaShem. By giving the reishis, the first fruits, to HaShem, the person is acknowledging that all his produce comes from HaShem.

So, too, tefila entails renouncing the first part of the day -- which could conceivably be spent in sleep or in some other activity -- and instead, dedicating it to tefila -- i.e., to his relationship with HaShem. By renouncing other possible ways of spending the reishis -- the beginning -- of the day, and davening, the person is symbolically dedicating the activities of his entire day to HaShem.

But note a potentially serious problem with this interpretation. Granted, Tefilas Shacharis can be compared to bikurim. However, a challenge to this analogy of tefila to bikurim soon comes to mind. In the course of the day, we have other tefilos -- Mincha and Arvis -- for which the concept of "reishis" is not relevant. Can we apply the tefila/bikurim analogy in the context of those other tefilos?

I suggest that we can. To address this question we draw on an idea of the Maharal (a thought that I saw many years ago). The Maharal points out that the time for Mincha often comes just when a person is preoccupied with some other activity. Just at the point where one's "at work" skills are going into high gear, it is time to daven Mincha. Likewise, the time for davening Arvis often arrives just when alternative activities beckon most seductively. For example, just when alternative activities beckon most seductively. For example, just when a person is beginning to relax after the day's work; just when one is "winding down" -- just then, the call comes out for Arvis.

Thus, the analogy between bikurim and tefila does work. Bikurim involves renouncing the most sought-after fruit, and thus symbolically dedicating all of one's produce to HaShem. (Question: To whom is the person signaling with this symbolic act? Answer: Obviously to himself!)

So, too, in our context. With tefila, a person breaks off what he would otherwise do -- sleep, work, relax -- in order to attend to his relationship with HaShem. By this reallocation of his time, a person symbolically dedicates all of his day's activities to HaShem.

At this point, the Sfas Emes asks a question that may have been bothering you. The Sfas Emes began this ma'amar with "Ha'yom ha'zeh ..." ("Today ..."). How does the focus on "today" fit into this discussion of bikurim and tefila? The Sfas Emes cites Rashi and the Medrash on this issue. They respond to the implicit question by explaining that just as today is a new day, so too should we view the Torah and mitzvos as new every day. What does that mean? It means living and doing mitzvos with all the excitement that comes with doing something God-given -- i.e., important and pleasant -- for the first time. Living our lives that way would involve radical changes. So, to bolster his position, the Sfas Emes quotes a familiar maxim: "Be'chol yom yi'heyu be'eine'cha ke'chada'shim". ("Every day, view the Torah and mitzvos as brand new.")

Then, the Sfas Emes poses a startling question. Is the Torah trying to mislead us by having us regard as new something that in fact has been with us for a long time? The Sfas Emes responds: We have within ourselves the capacity to make things new. That is, HaShem built into the cosmos the quality of constantly being new -- and hence, being constantly fresh. For, as we know, HaShem is "mechadeish bechol yom tamid ma'asei bereishis". That is, HaShem is constantly renewing creation.

A metaphor may help us grasp this phenomenon of constant creation. A current of electricity, when connected to an iron bar, magnetizes the iron. With this magnetism, the iron bar can attract and pick up metal filings. However, if the flow of electricity stops, the iron bar loses its magnetism, and the metal filings fall to the ground. So too, HaShem provides a constant flow of chiyus (vitality) to the cosmos. Without this flow from Him, the world would cease to exist.

Since the world is constantly being created, in principle, we should be able to perceive the world as it really is, i.e., fresh and new. But, as the Sfas Emes acknowledges, in practice, it is hard to get an accurate picture of reality. Why? Because when HaShem created the world, He also built in a klipa, an outer husk, that covers and hides His constant energizing role. What is the standard word for that

klipa? "Teva" (Nature).

But, continues the Sfas Emes, we have within ourselves the power to unmask the Presence of HaShem that the klipa hides. How? To answer this key question, the Sfas Emes returns to the text with which we started: "Ha'yom ha'zeh HaShem ... metza'vecha la'asos ...". As we saw earlier, the pshat reading of that pasuk has HaShem commanding us to do -- to obey -- His decrees ("Today, HaShem ... commands you to do ...") By contrast, the Sfas Emes reads this pasuk as telling us: "HaShem commands you to make every day into "today", i.e., to affirm creation's constant newness and freshness.

Further, the Sfas Emes tells us how to go about this task. We can find HaShem's hidden Presence by performing mitzvos, for mitzvos are actions in the physical world that embody HaShem's chiyus. Note that the Sfas Emes is not directing us to a life of contemplation. On the contrary, we find the freshness of "hayom hazeh" in our everyday lives by performing mitzvos -- i.e., physical actions in the physical world ('olam hagashmi').

The Sfas Emes now moves on, as he quotes a pasuk in Yechezkel (46:1), a pasuk that describes the architectural plans for the third Beis HaMikdash. The pasuk tells us that the edifice should have an inner court and a gate leading into that inner court. Further, the pasuk tells us that the gate to the inner court should be open only on Shabbos and Rosh Chodesh, but closed on weekdays.

The Sfas Emes reads the pasuk as telling us the following message. Just as the gate to the inner court in the Beis HaMikdash were opened on Shabbos, so, too, on Shabbos we can experience greater awareness of HaShem's ongoing creation. Thus, on Shabbos we gain easier access to HaShem's Presence as the source of the chiyus that constantly renews the world. And, the Sfas Emes tells us, we can apply this feature of newness even further -- by renewing OURSELVES on Shabbos!

The Sfas Emes continues, assuring us that we can -- and, indeed, must ("tze'richim") -- extend that heightened access to kedusha from Shabbos to the days of the week. The pshat meaning of the pasuk in Yechezkel is: the gate shall be closed during the week, but shall be open on Shabbos. But working in non-pshat mode, the Sfas Emes reads the pasuk as telling us that, by means of Shabbos, the gate will also be open during the weekdays. As you see, the Sfas Emes's ko'ach ha'chidush (innovative power) is so great that he presents a non-pshat that is the very reverse of the pshat!

The Sfas Emes concludes by returning to the Medrash Tanchuma that he quoted at the outset. As you may recall, the Medrash there quotes a pasuk in Tehilim that deals with tefila. The pasuk continues: "nish'ta'chaveh ve'nichra'a" ("...let us prostrate ourselves and bow ..."). To explain the sequence of the pasuk's ideas, the Sfas Emes reads the word "venichra'a" as a nif'al (i.e., a passive) construction. That is, the verb should be understood as: "we will be bowed".

Thus, the Sfas Emes sees the pasuk as proceeding in the following sequence. If we are willing actively to prostrate ourselves before HaShem, He will help us by facilitating our "being bowed". The

Sfas Emes explains. In the measure that we subordinate ourselves to see the world as HaShem wants us to see it -- with the light of HaShem's Presence hidden by the klipa -- He will enable us to experience it as our true reality.

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