

Toronto Torah

Beit Midrash Zichron Dov

Parshat Ki Tavo

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Joy in a Relationship with G-d

Rabbi Jonathan Ziring

When the Jews enter the Land of Israel, they are enjoined to bring the first fruits (*bikkurim*) to the Beit HaMikdash, and to perform a recitation that encapsulates the history that brought the Jews, and the individual farmers, to their current moment. The mitzvah closes with a call to rejoice:

And you shall rejoice in all of the bounty that your G-d has bestowed upon you and upon your household, together with the Levite and the stranger in your midst. (Devarim 26:11)

What is the nature of “and you shall rejoice”? Is it a commandment, a promise, or something else?

1: A Reward of Joy

Rabbi Yosef Bechor Shor writes that this is a promise of reward. If one brings the *bikkurim*, G-d will enable him to rejoice.

2: A Commandment to Rejoice

Several midrashim explain that the verse includes a commandment mandating all kinds of rejoicing, including song (Arachin 11b), a formal accompaniment to many sacrifices in the Beit HaMikdash. These sources focus on the word “rejoice” by itself.

3: Permission to Rejoice

Several authorities, however, highlight a potential connection between the beginning and end of the verse, between “rejoicing” and the fact that one accomplishes this with “all the bounty that your G-d has bestowed.” The mitzvah of *bikkurim* instills humility,

reminding people that their wealth is not their own, but rather G-d’s.

The stated purpose of several commandments is to avoid this pitfall, and this may be a goal of the *bikkurim*. The Rambam, for example, writes:

The reciting of a certain portion of the Law when the first fruits are brought to the temple, tends also to create humility. For he who brings the first fruits takes the basket upon his shoulders and proclaims the kindness and goodness of G-d. This ceremony teaches man that it is essential in the service of G-d to remember the times of trouble and the history of past distress, in days of comfort. (Guide for the Perplexed 3:39, Friedlander tr.)

Thus, while the person is permitted to rejoice, he must remember that his wealth comes from G-d. This verse can be understood as permission – as long as one avoids hubris, one is permitted to enjoy. As long as one keeps the perspective that the produce belongs to G-d, he can celebrate.

4: Rejoicing in G-d

Rav Shimshon Raphael Hirsch (Commentary to the Torah) and Rabbi Yaakov Mecklenberg (*HaKtav Ve-HaKabbalah*), however, say that “that your G-d has bestowed” qualifies the nature of the joy itself. Rav Hirsch writes that the process of reciting the declaration of the *bikkurim* and internalizing its lessons transforms one’s joy. When one eats the fruit with this mindset, the joy comes from eating that which was granted by G-d, feeling that

G-d takes care of the Jewish people as a nation and as individuals.

Similarly, Rav Mecklenberg contends that rather than celebrate the natural joy of having bounty, or the joy of feeling control over that which one produced, one celebrates the acceptance of G-d. By preceding the enjoyment of the harvest with the *bikkurim* ritual, one transforms eating into an act of accepting G-d and the One ruler and owner of the land. Thus, one celebrates the experience of accepting G-d, and what the true Master of the land shared with this farmer and his family.

The Talmud (Berachot 35a) writes that reciting a blessing on food allows one to eat by taking the food from belonging to G-d to being man’s. Here we can apply the perspectives from above – we can either treat a blessing as a way of permitting food, or as an opportunity to transform every act of enjoyment into an opportunity to acknowledge G-d and His place in our lives. This expansive perspective on *bikkurim* and blessings ensures that every moment of our lives can be infused with the joy of a relationship with G-d.

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Summary

This short chapter is a continuation and conclusion of the previous one. Chapter 17 discussed G-d's defeat of the Jewish people's enemies, particularly Aram. This chapter deals with a proclamation of victory and the reactions of the other nations. [Rabbi Avraham Ibn Ezra says it is actually news of the victory over Assyria; Radak contends it is a prediction of the arrival of Mashiach.]

The chapter opens with the prophet addressing the people who live beyond the rivers of Kush. (1) According to Amos Chacham (Daat Mikra edition of Yeshayahu), Kush is a general name for the countries south of Egypt.

These people are described in glowing terms. They are tall people with shining features. Their reputation spreads far, and they send messengers along the many waterways connected to their land. (2)

The prophet tells the messengers from this distinguished land to return home with an announcement about G-d's victory: All the inhabitants of the earth will take notice when G-d raises His banner and blows the shofar to go to war. (3)

The text goes on to describe the decisiveness of G-d's victory. He will sit in

His palace and watch as the enemies are destroyed. They will be cut away like the trailing branches and twigs that are pruned from trees and vines before the harvest. (4-6)

Once G-d defeats these enemies, even the distinguished people beyond the rivers of Kush will send tributes to Him in Jerusalem. (7)

Insight

The third verse in this chapter mentions the shofar: "All those who inhabit the world and live on the earth, when a banner is raised take note, when a shofar is blown, take heed." This verse plays a prominent role in the liturgy and literature of Rosh Hashanah.

Rav Saadia Gaon uses it in his explanation of the symbolism of the shofar. [This is found in the Artscroll Machzor just before the Shofar Service.] He interprets the phrase, "those who... live on the earth" (*shochnei afar* - literally "those who lie in dust") as a reference to the resurrection of the dead. The sound of the shofar is thus symbolic of the resurrection.

Chazal included this verse in the Shofarot section of the Musaf prayer; this addition gives us some insight into a universalist theme in that prayer.

Our chapter describes how the honour and glory of G-d will ultimately spread throughout humanity. Kush was considered the edge of human settlement in the Middle East in biblical times. So the people who live beyond the rivers of Kush symbolizes the farthest possible extent of humanity. Even these distant people, who are dignified and powerful, become the messengers of G-d's greatness and pay tribute to Him.

By including the allusion to our chapter in Shofarot, Chazal are emphasizing the universal aspect of the shofar. This is as opposed to G-d communicating more narrowly, with the Jewish People, through the shofar, or us communicating with Him when we blow the shofar on Rosh Hashanah. The tension between the particular and universal aspects of the shofar is evident throughout the Shofarot blessing.

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Siddur Insights: L'David: An Elul Journey

L'David Hashem Ori, Psalm 27, is traditionally recited at the end of shacharit, and either minchah or maariv, every day from Rosh Chodesh Elul to Shemini Atzeret. Different reasons have been given for this custom. Some have written that this psalm has allusions to the holidays of Tishrei, which is the season during which we recite the psalm. Others, such as Rebbe Tzaddok HaCohen of Lublin in Pri Tzaddik, explain that this psalm speaks of the value of repentance, which is a major theme during this season. [See Toronto Torah Reeh 5782 for further reasons.]

Perhaps we may offer another explanation for why we say this psalm throughout Elul and most of Tishrei. In 27:4, the psalmist describes his chief desire in life: "One thing I ask from Hashem, only that do I seek: **to live** in the house of Hashem all the days of my life; **to gaze** upon the beauty of Hashem, and **to visit** His temple." Reading this, we are struck by a question: If the writer states that he has only one request, why does he ask for three things?

Perhaps he actually does present only one desire: to have a relationship with Hashem. But that relationship may be in three different ways. The first way is to live with Him, the second is to gaze at Him, and the third is to visit Him.

First, a person may feel so comfortable and rooted in the world of Torah and spirituality that they basically live there. This would be "to live" in the house of Hashem.

Sometimes, though, a person may want to feel distant from this holiness. Living in the house of Hashem may be perceived as too much of a burden or difficulty. [After all, in G-d's house, you need to always be on your best behaviour!] So, some people ask only to gaze upon Hashem's beauty – to take a quick look to appreciate it and be blessed by it, but then to quickly turn away.

And finally, there is a third type of relating to Hashem. This third person desires something more than only gazing, but less than living. This is the visitor. This person wants to fully appreciate Hashem's house, while never being permanently there. It's like popping into a class or to a service every once in a while.

Really, the psalmist makes one request – to connect with Hashem. He offers us three different models – to really live alongside Hashem, to gaze upon His beauty, or to occasionally visit.

This is why we recite this psalm during this season. During Elul, we are required to repent. But real repentance will not be able to happen without a personal journey – a journey where we ask ourselves, "What kind of connection with Hashem do I want?"

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Biography

Rabbi Shalom Noach Berezovsky Rabbi David Teller

Rabbi Shalom Noach Berezovsky was born on the 14th of Av 5671 in the town of Mosh, close to Slonim. He married the daughter of the Rebbe of Slonim, Rabbi Avraham Weinberg, and he moved to Israel in 1933. After the Holocaust he helped rebuild the Slonim sect of chassidut, which had nearly been destroyed.

In 1942 the Beit Avraham Slonim yeshiva was established in the Meah She'arim neighborhood in Jerusalem, and Rav Shalom began teaching there. In a few years he would become the Rosh Yeshiva. He served as a member of the directorate of the "independent" school system in Israel and on the Council of Torah Sages of Agudath Israel, as well as in the presidency of the committee of yeshivot. At this time he authored the *Netivot Shalom* series and began publishing many works of the previous Slonimer Rebbeim.

The *Netivot Shalom* series, which has volumes on the parshah, Jewish holidays and general topics in Jewish thought, has achieved widespread popularity, beyond traditional Chassidic learning. This is in part due to Rav Shalom's clear and illuminating writing style, deep and insightful commentary and omission of the heavier Kabbalistic references which characterize many Chassidic works and make them difficult for the masses to fully appreciate.

Many Slonimer Chassidim began accepting Rav Shalom as their rebbe during the end of his father-in-law's life. This sparked a protest, as others felt that Rabbi Avraham Weinberg should remain the leader of Slonim chassidut until his passing. Today, Slonim Chassidut is divided into two large sects, one headed by the Berezovsky family (under the leadership of Rabbi Shalom's son), the other headed by the original Weinberg dynasty. Rabbi Shalom Noach Berezovsky passed away on the 14th of Av 5760 (August 8, 2000).

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Torah and Translation

Elul: Our Gateway Into the New Year Rabbi Shalom N. Berezovsky, Netivot Shalom, Shoftim 1-2 Translated by Rabbi Steven Gotlib

"שופטים ושופטים תתן לך בכל שעריך אשר ד' אלוקים נותן לך." צ"ב אומר "תתן לך בכל שעריך" בלשון יחיד, שהרי מצות מינוי הדיינים היא מצוה המוטלת על הרבים. ואיתא ע"ז מהגה"ק רבי חיים ויטל ז"ל, וכן כתב בשל"ה הק' ובעוד ספה"ק, דיש לאדם כמה שערים, שער השמע שער הריח שער הדיבור ושער המישוש, וצריך שיעשה אדם בעצמו דיון על כל ענייניו ויפקח עיניו, וזה שנא' "תתן לך" לשון יחיד... שיהודי ירים את כל שערי האברים הללו בלתי לד' לבדו, ע"י "שופטים ושופטים תתן לך", שלכל אלו השערים צריך יהודי למנות על עצמו שופטים ושופטים. כל הבטה שיהודי מביט בעיניו צריך לדון ולהתבונן מה רצון ד' שיראה ומה אינו לרצון ד'...

...דמשמעות "שער" שדרכו הכניסה לבית. ועד"ז יש בעולם כמ"ד (בראשית כח) "אין זה כי אם בית אלקים וזה שער השמים, שמקום המקדש הוא שער לעלות השמים. וכן ישנו בשנה שער קודם הכניסה לשנה חדשה והוא חודש אלול... היינו שלא כפי הנראה בפשטות שחודש אלול הוא החודש האחרון בשנה והרי הוא סוף השנה, אלא חודש אלול הוא התחלת השנה החדשה, והוא השער שכל השנה החדשה תלויה בו, שלפי מדת ההכנה בחודש אלול נקבעת כל השנה... וכן השער של ש"ק הוא בערב ש"ק. והשער של כל יום הוא בהשכמת הבוקר, וכל המחבר בריש השו"ע, "יתגבר כארי לקום בבוקר לעבודת בוראו", שזהו שער היום שצריך אז להתגבר כארי... ועד"ז יש בנפש, כמו שנתבאר למעלה, שכל מהות האדם מורכבת משערים. וכל חיי האדם תלויים בשערים, אם מתרומם כראוי בחודש אלול אז כל השנה נבנית במדרגה אחרת, וכן בכל שערים.

"You shall place judges and officers at all of your gates..." Note that the verse speaks in the singular even though the mitzvah to appoint judges is communal. Rabbi Chaim Vital, as well as the holy Shelah and other holy books, answer by noting that human beings have many gates - a gate for hearing, a gate for smelling, a gate for speaking, and a gate for touching - and humans must make themselves into a judge of all the things that they can sense. And this is why it says "you shall place" in the singular... Each Jew must make sure that each gate of their body is dedicated to Hashem alone, and that is what it means for you to place judges and officers. At each of these gates, a Jew must place judges and officers. Everything that a Jew can see needs to be judged as to whether it is what Hashem wants them to see or if it is not what Hashem wants them to see.

The meaning of a gate is that it is the way to enter a house. And along the lines of this understanding there is [a gate] in the world, as it says "This is none other than the abode of G-d, and that is the gateway to heaven." That the place of the Temple is the gate to ascend to heaven. And there is a gate before entering the new year, which is the month of Elul... Meaning, it is not as it appears simply, that the month of Elul is the last month of the year and therefore the end of the year. Rather, Elul is the start of the new year, the gate which the entire new year depends on, for the measure of the preparation done in Elul for the new year impacts the entire year... So too the gate of the holy Sabbath is the eve leading into the holy Sabbath. And the gate of every day is waking up in the morning, as Rabbi Yosef Karo wrote in the beginning of the Shulchan Aruch, "One should strengthen himself like a lion to get up in the morning to serve his Creator..." And along these lines there is [a gate] in the soul, as explained above, for human beings are made up of gates. And all of human life depends on gates. If they rise properly during the month of Elul the entire year will be on another level, and so too for all gates.

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Shabbat Sept 16-17

20 min before minchah on Friday, R' Steven Gotlib, Erev Shabbos Chassidus, Village Shul

After hashkamah R' Yehuda Mann, Halachah from the Parshah, Clanton Park

Before minchah R' Jared Anstandig, The Mountains of Blessings and Curses, Shaarei Shomayim

Before minchah R' Steven Gotlib, Pirkei Avot, Village Shul

After minchah Idan Rakovsky, Mitzvot in the Parshah, Shaarei Tefillah

After minchah R' Mordechai Torczyner, Gemara Ketuvot, BAYT (Gruda Beis Medrash) (men)

Motzaei Shabbat Sept 17-18

11:15 PM R' Mordechai Torczyner, Guilt, King David and You, Shaarei Tefillah

12:30 AM R' Mordechai Torczyner, Defying Gravity: Moshe's Model, Aish Thornhill

Sunday Sept 18

9:00 AM R' Zev Spitz & R' Yehuda Mann, Semichat Chaver Program, Clanton Park (men)

Monday Sept 19

2:00 PM Idan Rakovsky, Elul 5782, ZOOM: <http://tiny.cc/idanrak>

8:30 PM R' Yehuda Mann, Getting Ready for Tishrei, Shomrai Shabbos (men)

Tuesday Sept 20

9:00 AM Idan Rakovsky, Tzidkat haTzaddik, Yeshivat Or Chaim (university)

1:30 PM R' Mordechai Torczyner, Wisdom of King Solomon, ZOOM: <http://tiny.cc/weeklymt> (men)

7:30 PM R' Mordechai Torczyner, Shemuel (Chap. 16), ZOOM: <http://tiny.cc/weeklymt> (men) *not this week*

Wednesday Sept 21

6:30 AM R' Jared Anstandig, Talmud: Avodah Zarah, Shaarei Shomayim

After maariv R' Yehuda Mann, Contemporary Halachah, Clanton Park

8:15 PM Idan Rakovsky, Jonah: Between Man and Nature, Shaarei Tefillah

Thursday Sept 22

1:30 PM R' Mordechai Torczyner, Shemuel (Chap. 27), ZOOM: <http://tiny.cc/weeklymt> (women) *not this week*

8:00 PM R' Yehuda Mann, Gemara Beitzah, *not this week*

Friday Sept 23

9:00 AM R' Jared Anstandig, Parshah, Yeshivat Or Chaim (university)

10:30 AM R' Jared Anstandig, R' Mordechai Torczyner, R' Yehuda Mann, Ketuvot Perek 1 *advanced*
In-person at Yeshivat Or Chaim, on ZOOM at <http://tiny.cc/frishiur>

Our Professional Ethics Classes return after Succot, on ZOOM!

7:30 PM Monday evening October 31, Legal Ethics
Shepherding Jewish Families Through Family Law Litigation, Part 2
Registration is now open at <https://torontotorah.com/cpd>
On ZOOM at <http://tiny.cc/mtethics>

12:30 PM Wednesdays November 9, 16 and 23, Business Ethics
Debt Forgiveness: Good Religion, Good Business?
COVID, Hockey Canada and the Toxic Workplace
When Employers Change the Terms of Employment
Registration will be at <https://torontotorah.com/business>
On ZOOM at <http://tiny.cc/bmlunch>

7:30 PM Monday evening November 21, Medical Ethics
Vaccination and Risk-Taking in Judaism
Registration will be at <https://torontotorah.com/cme>
On ZOOM at <http://tiny.cc/mtethics>