

KI SAVO

BIKURIM, TOTAL DEDICATION

A

Bikurim—and Much Bowing and Praying

The *parsha* begins with the *mitzva* of *bikurim*. Every farmer in Israel has a *mitzva* to bring a gift of first fruits from the seven species to the Beis Hamikdash. He is supposed to deliver them to the *kohen* as a token of his appreciation for Hashem's beneficence in giving him the blessings of fruits and crops in Israel.

The Midrash Tanchuma makes a puzzling statement, which Shem Mishmuel explains. The Midrash quotes the *pasuk* “*Bo'u nishtachav'eh v'nichra'a nivrecha lifnei Hashem o'seinu*. Let us prostrate, kneel, and bow before Hashem our Maker.” We actually say this *pasuk* in our own prayers. The Midrash wants to know the difference between these three forms of bowing. What is the difference between *hishtachavaya*, *kriya*, and *bricha*?

The *hishtachava* form of bowing means to lie flat with one's face on the floor, while extending one's arms and legs. *Nichra'a* means to kneel; with his knees on the floor, the person also places his hands down. We will later see what *nivrecha* means. These are the three different forms of bowing to Hashem.

What is the meaning of all this? The Midrash gives an unclear and puzzling answer. Moshe Rabbeinu had an inspired prophetic vision, *ruach hakodesh*. He saw that the Beis Hamikdash would

eventually be destroyed and the *mitzva* of *bikurim* would cease. With no Beis Hamikdash, we wouldn't be able to fulfill the *mitzva* of *bikurim*. So, Moshe decreed that the Jewish people pray three times a day—*shacharis*, *mincha*, and *maariv*—since Hashem loves prayers.

This is a puzzling Midrash. First, there is the discussion of the three forms of bowing before Hashem. What do they mean? What is their connection to *bikurim*? Second, what is the meaning of Moshe's vision of the future termination of the *mitzva* of *bikurim* that would happen together with the destruction of the Beis Hamikdash? This was the motive for his *takana* of instituting the three daily prayers. How do these prayers replace the *bikurim*?

Why are *bikurim* the *mitzva* that must have a replacement? There were many *mitzvos* of the Beis Hamikdash that ceased with its destruction. Why does the Midrash single out the *mitzva* of *bikurim* as the prime *mitzva* of the Beis Hamikdash? Why does this *mitzva* need to be replaced and how do prayers replace it?

B

Fingers of the Hands and Fingers of the Feet

Shem Mishmuel discusses the significance of the three forms of bowing mentioned above. He explains a fascinating idea. The explanation starts with a statement from the oldest book of Kabbala, *Sefer Yetzira*. It is ascribed to Avraham Avinu, and was passed down through the generations. It says that Hashem made a compact with Avraham when He made the *bris mila* with him. This covenant continues for generations. *Sefer Yetzira* describes the *mitzva* in a strange way. Hashem made the pact with Avraham between the ten fingers of his hands and the ten fingers of his feet. The circumcision clearly takes place in an area of the body between the hands and the feet. Somehow, *bris mila* is connected

to the fingers of the hands and the fingers of the feet. What does this mean?

Shem Mishmuel explains this based on another Midrash that says angels have no evil inclination. When Hashem tells them not to do something, He only tells them once. One word from God is enough. However, people have an evil inclination. So, when God tells people to stop, He says it twice. Many *psukim* read, *va'yedaber Hashem el Moshe leimor*. *Vayedaber* and *leimor* are said twice. Once is not enough. This is because Moshe is not an angel. He was a human being and had a *yeitzer hara*, so he had to be told twice. This Midrash explains why we see this *pasuk* so often in the Torah. Since Moshe was human, Hashem urged him twice to do or not do whatever He commanded.

C

Secrets

Shem Mishmuel quotes his father, the Avnei Nezer, who offers a deeper interpretation of this idea. There's a fundamental rule in life, as Chassidus emphasizes. The Gemara in Chagiga 13 quotes a passage from Sefer Ben Sira: "*B'mufla mimcha al tidrosh, bim'chusa mimcha al tachkor*. Don't try to reveal things that are hidden. Don't even think of things that are covered." Don't delve into secrets—what is behind, what is ahead, what is above and what is below. Only deal with what you are supposed to deal with.

The human being has a mind. It is a tremendous tool. We are supposed to use this tool to think. However, we have to realize that no matter how bright and brilliant we are, there are many elements of the universe that Hashem has created which we will never know. He has kept a certain portion of His creation secret, only for Himself, or perhaps for a select few people. These are called *nistaros*, secret things. According to Chassidus, the majority of God's creation will never be known to us. We will never

understand in this world what heaven is like, what Gan Eden is, how Hashem administers the system of reward and punishments, how God runs the world in terms of morality and ethics, and of what happens to us in our after-life experiences.

This is besides the deep mysteries of science. I recently read an article in a science journal that said that for every discovery in science, ten new problems arise. The discovery itself raises ten new questions. As our scientific knowledge expands, our lack of knowledge increases tenfold! When I grew up in school, our teachers taught us that the atom has a nucleus and neutrons and protons. In the atom you have electrons spinning around the nucleus. We thought there were only three parts to an atom, naïve as we were.

Then they built nuclear accelerators and after smashing some protons and neutrons they discovered that within the protons and neutrons were many sub-atomic particles. The proton is not one simple element, but rather comprised of many sub-elements. And who knows what those are made of themselves? As we've delved into this one area, we have discovered so much that we don't know. This applies to medicine as well, and every human endeavor. We are dealing with a world of *nistaros*, secrets. There are more secrets than the things that we will ever know.

Why do you have to go and discover every secret that Hashem has put away? Don't try to find out all secrets. Some are not for you to know.

In human affairs, this is also good advice. You don't have to know everybody's secrets and motivations. When someone tells you new information about other people, you don't need to know how he found that out. Why do you have to do know how he found out? Let secrets be.

God gave us a mind to discover things. It is also supposed to know where not to look, to restrict itself to focus on what should be known. There is a limitation on the human mind. Although we have a great mind, there are things that are higher, more secret

and more hidden, things that we are not supposed to probe. We are supposed to accept that that's the way things are and that certain things are beyond our grasp.

This includes how Hashem deals with *tov* and *ra*, good and bad things that happen to people. Despite all the different approaches to this question in our tradition, including *sefer* Iyov and many Gemaras, there is no final and complete answer. There is something about good and bad events happening to people that will always remain mysterious. This question will never be fully understood by people.

D

Dual Limitations

We have to know when to stop probing. This is a restriction on the upper end of the human experience, on our thoughts. Furthermore, on the lower end we need to control our physical desires. We live in this world, and we have to care for our physical concerns. We have to eat and drink and sleep. But we should limit the comforts we pursue. While caring for our physical needs, we must maintain our humanity. We can't always give into our physical instincts. We must have dual limitations, one limit on our upward reach and the other on our downward reach.

Shem Mishmuel says this is symbolized by the *bris mila*, which is between the fingers of the hands and the fingers of the feet. When a person raises his hands, his fingers rise higher than any other part of the body. The toes reach the lowest point of the whole body.

The covenant of *mila* symbolizes restriction. As Jews, we can't do everything we want to do, and we can't think of everything we want to think of. We embrace the concept of restriction as symbolized by the fingers of the hands and feet, not going up too high and not sinking too low.

Angels are essentially intellectual; they don't have a physical side as we understand it. Also, angels are restricted. God tells each angel his mission and the angel has no other responsibilities. Hashem tells the angel only once what he has to do. The angels know that they should not try to rise above their missions. People, though, are told of their missions twice. "Do your mission," Hashem says. "But don't try to go above your mission and don't go below it, either." Man has a double restriction, both on his upper and lower levels.

E

Three Kinds of Submission

We now return to the three forms of bowing to Hashem. In *hishtachavaya*, a person completely prostrates himself in front of Hashem. We do this on Yom Kippur, stretching our hands and legs as we lie flat on the floor. Through this body language we say to Hashem, "I submit to You with my hands, which can reach as high as I can, and with my legs, which reach down as far as I can go. Both parts of me are subject to Your will." We place our hands and fingers flat on the ground, even though they should reach up. Even though our legs can stretch and move us in different directions, we place them flat on the floor. This indicates that we nullify our human reach before the will of God. Our reach in both directions, up and down, are controlled by Hashem.

The second form of bowing, kneeling, doesn't involve the hands. It involves bowing on the legs. The knees are bent, and the person kneels. The act of *kriya* is primarily in the legs, hips, stomach, and chest, the middle area of the human body.

We know the human being has three levels of soul: *nefesh*, *ruach*, and *neshama*. These soul levels power the three elements of human existence: the physical, emotional, and intellectual. In bending the knees, this form of bowing represents controlling

one's emotions, the middle section of the person. It does not relate to the intellect. The full bowing also includes the submission of the *sechel*. *Hishtachavaya* emphasizes surrendering one's mind in particular. When a person prostrates before God, he surrenders his or her intellect to Him. I will think in the ways that He wants me to think. *Kriya*, kneeling on the legs, does not involve the head. It involves the hips, legs and knees, stomach, and chest. This takes the middle section of the body and surrenders the emotional part to Hashem.

In summary, *hishtachavaya* surrenders the intellect and *kriya* surrenders the emotional aspects of the soul.

The third form, *bricha*, is a kind of bowing which is not flat out and not exactly on the knees. It reminds us of the word *livroch*. This is an agricultural method, a way of replanting certain kinds of vegetation. In this method, a plant that grows straight up is turned down and its top part is replanted into the ground. Afterwards, the top end of the plant will grow roots and essentially become a new growth. This is a specialized form of farming and helps yield more crops. This form of bowing, then, probably involved curling down into somewhat of a ball, with the person bringing his head down close to his knees. This would resemble the agricultural method.

What is the idea of this kind of bowing? The body itself is twisted to do God's will. *Hishtachavaya* focuses on the *sechel*, because it involves the hands. *Kriya* involves the middle and lower sections, as the hips and torso are bent over, representing the *ruach*. Then *bricha*, turning the body into a ball shape, represents the *nefesh*, that the body itself will be subject to Hashem's will. *Nefesh*, *ruach*, and *neshama* are represented uniquely in each of these three forms of bowing. We subject each part of ourselves to Hashem.

Mystical Universes

Shem Mishmuel takes this one step further. He uses this model to explain three of the four universes Hashem created. The first universe, *Atzilus*, is so high that even the mystics don't really understand it. Then come the universes of *Briya*, *Yetzira*, and *Asiyah*. We live in *Asiya*. *Yetzira* is where the angels are. *Briya* is where the souls of Gan Eden and God's throne are.

The three worlds that, according to Kabbala, we can have access to are *Briya*, *Yetzira*, and *Asiya*. Our three-part soul corresponds to these three levels. *Asiya* corresponds to our physical side, the *nefesh*. We are physical beings; that's why we fit here in this world. This world, therefore, is an important world for *mitzvos*. Above this world is *Yetzira*, the world of angels, where the *ruach* of man belongs. Angels don't sin. They represent prayers and songs to God. This emotional, *ruach* side is the source of speech. Angels talk and communicate; people do that, too. The wind, literally *ruach*, that comes from one's mouth forms that speech. The highest level of the soul is the *neshama*, intellect. This fits into the level of *Briya*. When the human intellect ponders the greatness of God, then we ascend to the world of *Briya*.

The world of *Briya* is almost completely good. *Yetzira* has both good and bad, as there are both good angels and bad angels. The world of *Asiya*, according to Kabbala, is mainly bad. Surprisingly, there are more bad energies in this world than good. It is a tough world since it is mostly physical. The situation is stacked against us, pushing us towards evil. Man often finds himself in evil situations, as the verse states, "*Yeitzer lev ha'adam ra mi'ne'urav*." This is why Hashem put us in this world. When we achieve the victory of good over evil in this world, we create goodness in evil's home territory.

Seven *Mitzvos*, Seven *Sefiros*

The Rambam writes that when a person brings *bikurim* he fulfills seven *mitzvos*. 1) He brings them to the Beis Hamikdash. 2) He places them in a vessel. 3) He reads the *psukim*. 4) He brings a sacrifice. 5) He sings songs. 6) He lifts them. 7) He stays in Yerushalayim. There is also an additional *mitzva*: to bow.

Hashem created the world in ten steps, known as the ten *sefiros*. In Chassidus and Kabbala, there are ten levels of God's *middos*, and ten corresponding human traits of *tzelem Elokim*. The levels of existence therefore are related to the number ten. Ten is the basic number of our number system because Hashem created the world in ten steps.

In Kabbala, the number ten is split into three parts. The first set consists of three points, then six points, and then the final point, number ten. The first three, called *chochma*, *bina*, and *da'as*, are more intellectual, relating to God's throne. The next six: *chesed*, *gevura*, *tiferes*, *netzach*, *hod*, and *yesod*, are in the *Olam Ha'yetzira*, the world of angels, the emotional world. Finally, *malchus*, the last of the ten, has to do with action and our physical world. These are the ten levels of God's creation and they are reflected in the three universes that we can fathom.

The number seven therefore represents the connected middle and lower levels of existence: the six emotions of the world of the angels, plus the final point of action in this world.

We see through this that *bikurim* has ten levels. It has seven *mitzvos* and involves bowing, which is the eighth event. Bowing, as we explained, represents the *sechel*. I give my intellect to God. With this kind of bowing we surrender the three intellectual elements of *chochma*, *bina*, and *da'as*. We perform the seven *mitzvos* of *bikurim*. Through the *mitzvos* of *bikurim*, a person expresses and demonstrates dedication to Hashem with the seven *middos* of *Olam Ha'asiya*, the universe of action, and *Olam Ha'yetzira*, the

world of angels. Then, through bowing, he incorporates the top three points, dedicating his three intellectual levels to God as well.

When a farmer brings his *bikurim* to the Beis Hamikdash and bows down, he expresses that he is offering Hashem his totality. He offers his mind, his emotions, and his physical side in service to Hashem, in appreciation of the first fruits. He is fulfilling *lavdo b'chol levavchem, b'chol nafshechem uv'chol meodchem*, serving God with all his emotions, his intellect and his physicality.

H

Ten Step Dedications

On Rosh Hashana we recite ten *psukim* in the three special sections of *musaf*—*malchuyos, zichoronos, and shofros*. We say *psukim* from the Torah, *nevi'im*, and *ksuvim* (the *psukim* of *ksuvim* come entirely from Tehillim). The three *psukim* from Torah represent *sechel* and *neshama*. The three *psukim* from *nevi'im* represent the *ruach*, the inspiration of the prophets. The three *psukim* of Tehillim represent the physical *nefesh*. Dovid was king in this physical world. He dealt with the practical concerns of the economy and with military and social concerns. His was the level of *nefesh*. In using the *psukim* of Torah, *nevi'im*, and *ksuvim* we dedicate the totality of our being to Hashem—our intellect and emotions, as well as our physical side. At the beginning of the year we totally dedicate ourselves to Hashem for the whole year.

Shem Mishmuel says we repeat this process every day when we wake up in the morning. A Jewish man puts on *tzitzis* and *tefillin* and says *kriyas shema*. These *mitzvos* address all three levels of the human being. *Tzitzis* has to do with the body, the physical level; the *tefillin* with the *ruach*; and *kriyas shema* with the mind.

Good Beginnings

“Hakol holeich achar hareishis. Everything depends on how you begin.” If you begin something properly, then, with that good foundation, everything that follows will more easily go in the proper way. But if you start off the wrong way, stumbling at the beginning, it can be very difficult to get back on track. If a racehorse stumbles out of the gate in a race, he will most probably lose. It is very important to start off well.

Rosh Hashana is very important since it is the beginning of the year. If we can start off the year with proper, good dedication to Hashem, with intellectual, emotional and physical dedication, then we can more easily have a good year. Rosh Chodesh is also a beginning. Every morning we begin our day with *davening*, starting the day on a good spiritual foundation. This then makes it easier to go through the day as a spiritual experience.

The first fruits are the beginning, the physical start for a farmer. The farmer must also make sure that the spiritual side is done properly. The farmer brings these fruits to Yerushalayim, the first of all cities of the world. If Yerushalayim is good, then the whole world will be good.

These first fruits are brought to Yerushalayim. Every city of the world can learn from Yerushalayim. So many heads of state come nowadays to visit Yerushalayim. They want to see the holiest city of the world. They want to see how the holy city functions. “Maybe I can model my city and state after Yerushalayim,” they think.

The Jewish nation is the first nation in the world. *“Kodesh yisrael laShem reishis tevuaso.”* Am Yisrael is the first of Hashem’s harvest. We are the first of all the nations. If the first is established properly, then everything else can model after that beginning. If the Jewish people has its spirituality and service of Hashem in order, then we can serve as a powerful model for the rest of the

nations of the world. This is the primary mission of Am Yisrael, as Yeshayah 61 teaches, “You are the priests of Hashem.” You will lead the world and they will model themselves after you, just as every Jew models himself after the *kohen gadol* in the Beis Hamikdash.

Beginnings are so important—of marriage, of school, of a job, of a new home. Start these off the right way. Establish them as places and times that focus on spirituality, on serving Hashem in holiness.

This is why the Jewish people, the first of all peoples, takes their first fruits and brings them to Yerushalayim, the first of all cities. According to the Gemara, the best time to bring *bikurim* is in the summer time, between Shavuot and Sukkot. This is the time of the coming of Rosh Hashanah. It is the time of new beginnings and of change. The goal is to create a total commitment to Hashem at every level from the very beginning, from the most basic level.

J

Three Levels of Prayer

Moshe Rabbeinu saw a vision in *ruach hakodesh* that the Beis Hamikdash would be destroyed. He was upset because *bikurim* is such an important *mitzva*. It establishes the tone for everything in the Beis Hamikdash and in Eretz Yisrael for the Jewish people. It is the beginning that establishes the correct way. So, Moshe made three *tefillos* to replace it: *shacharis*, *mincha*, and *maariv*.

Avraham *davened shacharis*. Avraham the philosopher taught the world about Hashem. He was about *sechel*. We start the day with our *neschama* in *shacharis*. The second prayer is *mincha*, which comes from Yitzchak Avinu. He embodied *ruach*, incredible dedication of soul to give one’s life because of one’s love and dedication to the Almighty. This a function of the spirit and emotions. We *daven mincha* even during the bustle of the day,

taking the time to express our emotions to Hashem in the midst of everything. *Maariv* is the prayer of Yaakov Avinu, representing the *nefesh*. Night is a time of concern for physical safety. It can be a time of danger. Everything is black. People feel threatened in the dark. Much of Yaakov's life took place in this type of darkness. Yaakov had tremendous physical struggles with Eisav and Lavan. He represents commitment to Hashem in times of darkness.

Moshe thought, if we don't have a Beis Hamikdash and *bikurim*, at least let us have some way to dedicate ourselves to Hashem on all three levels. This is why Moshe introduced these three prayers. This is why the Midrash which connects them to the *bikurim* also connects them to the three forms of bowing to Hashem. Let us dedicate our *sechel* through *hishtachavaya*, our *ruach* through *kriya*, and our *nefesh* through *bricha*. We prostrate, kneel, bow, and twist into a ball, dedicating ourselves in every possible way to Hashem and to His Torah.

Let us hope that this incredibly inspiring message influences us at this important time of new beginnings. May this year be one of total and complete surrender to Hashem at every level, with our *nefesh*, *ruach*, and *neshama*. May we be *zoche* to all three worlds—*Asiya*, *Briya*, and *Yetzira*—and to return to Eretz Yisrael and to the Beis Hamikdash.

REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. What is the connection between *bris mila* and the fingers of the hands and the toes on the feet?
2. Why are we told things twice in the Torah, but angels are told only once?
3. What are the three basic levels of the human being's soul?
4. How does the soul level relate to the three universes?
5. Explain *hishtachavaya*, *kriya*, *bricha* and the significance of each.
6. How does *bikurim* represent the ten levels of creation?
7. How do *shacharis*, *mincha*, and *maariv* relate to the three levels of the soul?
8. How do *bikurim* and Rosh Hashana connect?
9. What is the significance of beginnings?

EXERCISES

1. *Daven shacharis* thinking of your *neshama*.
2. *Daven mincha* thinking of your *ruach*.
3. *Daven maariv* thinking of your *nefesh*.

Answers and Exercises
