

Bikkurim, Malkitzedek and Lechem HaPanim – Ki Tavo

השעור מקדש לרפואת שמעונה בת שרה

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ולקחת מראשית כל פרי האדמה אשר תביא מארצך אשר ה' אלקיך נתן לך
ושמת בטנא והלכת אל המקום אשר יבחר ה' אלקיך לשכן שמו שם. (דברים כו, ב)

Everyone knows the famous Midrash – בְּזִכּוֹת רַב מִתְּנִי, בְּזִכּוֹת – [אמר] רב הונא בשם רב מתני, בְּזִכּוֹת : בְּזִכּוֹת חֵלָה, וּמַעֲשָׂוֹת וּבִיכּוּרִים (בראשית רבה א, ד) ג', דְּבָרִים נִבְרָא הָעוֹלָם : בְּזִכּוֹת חֵלָה, וּמַעֲשָׂוֹת וּבִיכּוּרִים (בראשית רבה א, ד) that the world was created in the first place because of a principle called "ראשית". The Midrash brings numerous examples of things referred to in the psukim as ראשית - Hafrashat Challah, Ma'aserot, Bikkurim, and also the Torah, Am Yisrael and Moshe Rabbeinu who are also called ראשית.

The beginning of our parsha deals with ראשית פרי האדמה, the mitzva of Bikkurim. In this shiur we are going to explore why it was worth creating the world for Bikkurim and what connection there is between Bikkurim, Malkitzedek and the Lechem HaPanim in the Beit HaMikdash. It is a profound concept that has direct bearing on the month of Elul and our preparations for the יָמִים נוֹרָאִים.

Embedded in the passuk lies a hint to what makes all the cases of ראשית special. The rashei teivot of פְּרִי הָאֲדָמָה form the word - מִהְפֶּךְ. The concept of ראשית is a - "revolution".

A revolution is something *completely different*, diametrically opposite to what preceded it. בְּרֵאשִׁית בְּרָא אֱלֹהִים, HKB"H created an entire world out of *nothing*, יֵשׁ מֵאֵין. The Torah is a revolution, because it always was, and continues to be, the handbook of morality and light to mankind, when prior to it there was chaos and darkness תָּהוּ וְנִבְהוּ וְחָשֶׁךְ. Am Yisrael are a revolution because there has never been, before or since, a nation that has consistently clung to HKB"H like Am Yisrael. Challah is a revolution because it refers to Adam HaRishon, the first human in history, who was חֲלָתוֹ שֶׁל עוֹלָם, Hafrashat Challah from the earth, the first creature that has not only a physical body like the other creatures created before him, but also a spiritual soul. Ma'aser is a revolution because it is totally counterintuitive to primitive survival instinct – one human *giving* to another human to ensure *his own survival* - through reciprocity of society.

To understand why Bikkurim is a revolution we need to understand the story of Malkitzedek.

מִלְכִּי צֶדֶק מֶלֶךְ שֵׁם, according the Gemara (נדרים לב, ע"ב) was Shem the (firstborn?) son of Noach. The Ba'al HaTurim brings a hint in the passuk, the rashei teivot of שֵׁם מֶלֶךְ שֵׁם are שֵׁם.

The Gemara (סנהדרין סט, ע"ב) debates whether Shem was the biological firstborn or whether he was the *wisest*, most righteous, of the three sons of Noach. Either way, we see that Shem was considered the Kohen Gadol of the time who offered sacrifices to HKB"H (usually the job of the firstborn, re: Yaakov and Eisav).

The first time we encounter Malkitzedek (with *this* name and not the name Shem), is after Avraham's victory over the Four Kings led by Amrafel (aka. Nimrod) in a mission to rescue Lot. It is customary (even in modern times) to greet the victors in battle with a "tribute", some gift to acknowledge their victory. In WWII, the French welcomed the Allies with flowers and wine. Similarly, Malkitzedek welcomed Avraham with bread and wine, שֵׁם הוֹצִיא וּמִלְכִּי צֶדֶק מֶלֶךְ שֵׁם הוֹצִיא לָחֶם וַיִּין (בראשית יד, יח).

So, why is that revolutionary? After all, Avraham was a *descendant* of Shem and a pupil in the Yeshiva of Shem and Ever (זֶהר הַחֹדֶשׁ, פֶּרֶשׁת נח, קכח). It is natural that the Rosh Yeshiva would want to congratulate his star pupil on his victory ...

However, it is not so simple, because in this war, Avraham killed כְּדִרְלֶעֱמֶר. Eilam was the son of Shem! Star pupil or not, if you kill the Rosh Yeshiva's great-great... grandkids, he isn't going to be very happy about it! This is what the Midrash says – מִמֵּי הָיָה מִתִּנְיָא? מִשָּׁם בֶּן נֹחַ, שֶׁהָרַג אֶת בְּנוֹ עֵילָם... שֶׁהָרַג אֶת בְּנוֹ שֵׁם - עֵילָם וְאַשּׁוּר וְכוּ', וְהָרַגוּ וְהָיָה מִתִּנְיָא לומר שֶׁהָרַגְתִּי בְנוֹ שֵׁם וְכַתִּיב (בְּרֵאשִׁית, י) בְּנֵי שָׁם - עֵילָם וְאַשּׁוּר וְכוּ', וְהָרַגוּ וְהָיָה מִתִּנְיָא לומר שֶׁהָרַגְתִּי בְנוֹ שֵׁם. צֶדֶק עָשָׂה וְקִלְלָנִי וְאַמּוֹת (תנחומא, לד, טו).

HKB"H said to Avraham, "Do not fear. Not only will Shem not curse you, but he will greet you with gifts and bless you!"

The whole episode is counterintuitive and "revolutionary". Avraham went to rescue his nephew Lot and as a result killed the sons of Shem. Instead of cursing Avraham, Shem *blessed* Avraham and *went out to greet him with bread and wine*. Years later, you would think that the descendants of Lot, who Avraham *saved*, would come out and welcome Avraham's descendants Am Yisrael after the Exodus with food and drink in gratitude, but Moav, a descendant of Lot *refused* to greet Am Yisrael עַל דְּבַר אֲשֶׁר לֹא קָדְמוּ אֶתְכֶם בְּלָחֶם וּבִמְסִים בְּדֶרֶךְ. בְּצִאתְכֶם מִמִּצְרָיִם (דברים כג, ה). The whole thing is revolutionary – the opposite of what you would expect.

Why did Malkitzedek only give Avraham bread and wine and not also meat? The Alsheich (בראשית יד, יח) says that Malkitzedek, who was the Kohen

Gadol could not give Avraham meat, for the same reason that Beit Garmu never baked white bread in their own home and Beit Avtinas' daughters never used perfume (יומא לח, ע"א) – because of Mar'it Ayin. If Malkitzedek would have given Avraham meat, people might suspect he was using הקדוש from the korbanot for his personal use (to give as gifts).

So, how could Malkitzedek give Avraham bread and wine? (Lechem HaPanim, and Nesachim according to ילקוט שמעוני [ibid.]). The Alsheich says because at that time Lechem HaPanim and Nesachim were not yet part of the Avodah. The Yalkut Shimoni says that בְּזָכוֹת Malkitzedek giving Avraham bread and wine, Am Yisrael were *later* zocheh to merit the Lechem HaPanim and the Nesachim in the Mikdash.

This was not simply a "gift to the victor of a battle". In this episode, Malkitzedek was in effect *handing over the "reigns"* of the Kehuna Gedola to Avraham, either willingly or inadvertently (The Gemara [נדרים לב, ע"ב] says that Malkitzedek sinned by mentioning Avraham *before* HKB"H in his bracha and thus forfeited the role).

To me it appears that this was done willingly and not begrudgingly. The Gemara (יומא כח, ע"ב) says that not only Avraham studied under Rosh Yeshiva Shem, but also his son Yitzchak and his grandson Yaakov. So, obviously Shem never bore a grudge over losing the Kehuna Gedola, it seems that this was something *planned* – handing the role over from Bnei Noach to Bnei Avraham.

Shem the wisest son of Noach, the Kohen Gadol until Avraham, and the legendary Rosh Yeshiva of Yeshivat Shem and Ever understood a fundamental principle – **everything is from HKB"H**. At some point one person has it and then it is passed on to someone else and then on to someone else. If you understand this and do not misguidedly think that the "thing" is intrinsically yours, you have gratitude to HKB"H for the time it is in your possession and you happily pass it on to the next beneficiary or custodian.

This is the lesson that Malkitzedek teaches us about Bikkurim and it is hinted to in the psukim. The gematria of מִרְאשִׁית כָּל פְּרִי הָאֲדָמָה is the same gematria as וּמִלְכִּי צֶדֶק מְלֶכֶּךָ שְׁלָם הוֹצִיא לָחֶם וַיֵּין וְהוּא כֹהֵן לְאֵל עֶלְיוֹן.

The essence of the mitzva of Bikkurim and the fundamental concept of מִרְאשִׁית is the understanding that the fruit are a gift given to you by HKB"H. They are not intrinsically yours. You are just their temporary custodian. For the time they are in your possession you are grateful and give thanks. Fruit, bread (Challah), ALL your possessions, etc.

Similarly, with Eretz Yisrael. The first Rashi in the Torah - "Why does the Torah begin with Breishit and not הַחֲדָשׁ הַזֶּה לָכֶם רֵאשׁ הַחֲדָשִׁים, the first mitzva given to Am Yisrael? To teach us that the entire Creation and everything in it

belongs to HKB"H, including Eretz Yisrael. So that no nation can come claim that Eretz Yisrael belongs to them – it is HKB"H's, to give to whomever He pleases".

Similarly, with the Torah. Nobody can claim exclusive "ownership" over the Torah. HKB"H gives each of us our own חֵלֶק in the Torah, a closer "affinity" to a certain portion of the infinitesimal wealth of the Torah that we need to cherish, nurture and contribute our own chiddushim to, for future generations. To give thanks to HKB"H for giving us this חֵלֶק in the Torah and learn out of sense of deep gratitude.

Similarly, with our very *lives* and the lives of our loved ones. We misguidedly believe that our lives "belong" to us and we have propriety over them to do with them what we please. They are a precious *gift* given to us from HKB"H and we must show gratitude for and cherish every minute we are custodians of them.

All of the above are a revolution, a מַהפֶּחֶץ, because they are all counterintuitive. Logically, something you invest huge resources on developing should entitle you to some propriety, some sense of ownership. This is the way the world of the goyim works. You develop something, invest in it, take out a patent, a copyright etc. and theoretically it *belongs* to you.

That is not how HKB"H's creation works. לְה' הָאָרֶץ וּמְלוּאָהּ תִּבֶּל וַיֵּשְׁבִי בָּהּ (תהילים כד, א), there is only One Owner over *everything*, HKB"H. You can take out as many patents or copyrights as you want, you are just a temporary custodian of them – only because HKB"H chooses to give you the skills to develop them for the purpose of tikkun olam and to place them in your safekeeping for as long as He deems necessary. Our illusions of control are simply that – illusions. The only *real* way to ensure extended custodianship of anything is to give HKB"H a good reason to want to leave it in our custody.

The Lechem HaPanim which we merited because of Malkitzedek's gift to Avraham, not surprisingly embodies the same principles as above. The purpose of the Lechem HaPanim is a conduit for the שְׂפַע הַעֲלִיּוֹן, the Heavenly wealth and its distribution throughout HKB"H's creation.

All the natural resources - oil, diamonds, natural gas, metals, water, vast expanses of land for grazing, agriculture, rain, manpower, brains, climate, scenery, etc. etc. They are all channeled through the Lechem HaPanim, via "arteries of abundance" that radiate from the Beit HaMikdash to every corner of the world - down to the resolution of a single raindrop and a single atom. Now that the Mikdash is not in place and there is no Lechem HaPanim, what we regard as "abundance" is but a faint shadow of its true potential. Today the management of the "abundance" is monopolized by a miniscule percentage of power hungry, greedy people and is denied to most of humanity. This was the

scenario that Rivka was trying to prevent when she persuaded Yaakov to get Yitzchak's material blessing instead of Eisav.

The Swiss Alps do not belong to the Swiss, the Niagara Falls to USA/Canada, the canals to the Dutch and the Venetians. Neither do the Straits of Hormuz belong to the Iranians/Americans/Iranians/Americans/? ... They ALL belong to HKB"H and if anyone wants to keep them, they would be well advised to refer to the first Rashi in the Torah.

HKB"H takes things away from those who are not worthy and gives them to those who are *more* worthy. You will not merit custody over any of HKB"H's gifts if you do not recognize where they come from and fail to give gratitude to HKB"H for them (or if you attempt to destroy HKB"H's "chosen" people, the only people in history that have constantly and consistently "chosen" and clung to HKB"H).

This principle of ראשית in connection with the Bikkurim is always read two Shabbatot before Rosh HaShana, because gratitude to HKB"H for what He has given us is the *major focus* of Elul and a *prerequisite* for Rosh HaShana and the ימים נוראים.

During the Amidah in the ימים נוראים and עשרת ימי תשובה, we beseech HKB"H - זְכֵרְנוּ לַחַיִּים, give us life! A few lines later we "upgrade" that request a notch וְזֶכֶר יִצְוֵינוּ לַחַיִּים בְּרַחֲמִים, not just life, but life with *mercy*. After מוֹדִים we ask HKB"H בְּנֵי בְרִיתֶיךָ, now already it is *good* life. And just in case HKB"H doesn't know what "good" life is, we spell it out בְּרָכָה, בְּסֵפֶר חַיִּים*, וְשָׁלוֹם, וּפְרִיָּה וְרִבּוּיָּה, וְנִשְׁמָתָה וְנִחְמוּתָה. But that is not nearly the end of it. During the ימים נוראים we suddenly don "lawyers' robes" and elaborate *all the fine print* for the (virtual) asterisk in בְּסֵפֶר חַיִּים. A comprehensive *thirty-eight-line list* of Avinu Malkeinu's - שְׁלַח רַחוּמָה, מְנַע מִגָּפָה מִנְחָלֶתְךָ, מִלֵּא אֶסְמִינוּ שְׁבַע שָׁבָע, מִלֵּא אֶסְמִינוּ שְׁבַע, etc. etc.

Why don't we begin with the full list *straight from the beginning* - זְכֵרְנוּ לַחַיִּים, בְּרִיאוֹת, פְּרִיָּה, שְׁדוּכִים, נַחַת מֵהִילָדִים, etc. etc. Why only at the end? Where do we acquire the "gall" to ask HKB"H for such a lengthy "shopping list"?

R' Mordechai Eliyahu זצ"ל explains - הוֹדָאָה לַקַּב"ה עַל הָעֵבֶר, מְעוֹרָרָה - אֶפְשָׁר לְבַקֵּשׁ בְּקִשׁוֹת יְשׁוּעוֹת רַבּוֹת בְּעֵתִיד. לָכֵן רַק אַחֲרֵי שְׁמוֹדִים בְּבִרְכַּת הוֹדָאָה, אֶפְשָׁר לְבַקֵּשׁ בְּקִשׁוֹת יוֹתֵר. The *raison d'être* that enables us to ask HKB"H for *anything*, is that we first say "thank you". Expressing gratitude is the key that "unlocks" the treasury, as it were.

What is our main "task" during the month of Elul? Doing teshuva ... How does one do teshuva? The Rambam (ה"י תשובה ב, ב) spells it out.

There are four stages עֲזִיבַת הַחֵטָא, תְּחִינָה, וִידּוּי, קִבְלָה לַעֲתִיד. First, you have to *stop doing* the sin. Second, you have to *regret* that you committed the sin. Third, you have to do וִידּוּי, you have to "*admit*" the sin. Finally, fourth, you have to *resolve* never to do that sin again. In that order.

The only one I have always had a hard time understanding is the third stage, וִידּוּי.

Stage 1. Obviously, the *prerequisite* to doing teshuva in the first place is to stop doing the sin. One can hardly perform the process of teshuva for eating pork, while still *munching on some pork puffs*. So, the first thing you must do is get rid of all the "puffs" from your secret stash and wash your mouth out thoroughly to remove any taste. Only *then* can teshuva begin. But is this actually the "prerequisite"? Surely before even this, you must come to the realization that eating pork puffs is a sin (for a nice Jewish boy, anyway). If you do not acknowledge that eating pork is a sin, then why would you want to do teshuva in the first place? So, you have to first *admit* to yourself that eating pork is a sin and *then* stop doing it.

Stage 2, regret. You have to regret having eaten pork puffs (even though they were the yummiest thing you have ever tasted). But surely, before you regret doing something, you must first *admit* that that "something" is wrong? How can you regret doing something that you don't admit is a sin?

Stage 3. Admission. This is the stage I have trouble understanding. You have to *admit* your sin. But, hang on a sec., haven't I *already admitted* my sin in stages 1 and 2? How can you even perform stages 1&2 without first admitting that it is a sin? And that is not the only thing I have a problem with. Let's say for arguments' sake that the "admission" in stage 3 is *verbal* admission (and that when you "admitted" in stages 1&2, that was "silently" in your mind). OK, so you have to verbalize it out loud "I ate pork puffs!!!!". Remember, in stage 2 you *regretted* it, right? So, in stage three, you would expect that you should say it out loud, *sounding like you regretted it* - wailing, *bawling your eyes out*, pulling out your hair! "Woe is me! How could I have done such a thing? Will it even be possible to forgive such a sin? Etc. etc.

And here we find the *craziest thing* I believe we do on Yom Kippur. Rather than sounding like a cacophony of wailing women at a funeral, instead we perform our admission by – *singing it!* La la la, I ate pork puffs, la la la la la! Tum di dum di dum dum dum דִּבְרָנוּ דְּכִי, בְּגִדְנוּ, אֶשְׁמְנוּ, la la lala laaa!

How bizarre is that?

Then it dawned on me that none of us understand what וִידּוּי is at all. וִידּוּי is *not* derived from the root of הוֹדָא meaning "admitting", confessing something. וִידּוּי comes from the root of הוֹדָא meaning THANKS!

The third stage is not admitting the sin – we already did that in stages 1, 2. Stage 3 is **giving thanks to HKB"H, showing gratitude!**

For what?

Scenario A – because HKB"H forgives you for the *horrendous* sin of eating pork puffs and wipes your slate clean ... NO MORE SIN! Gone, vanished into thin air! PUFF...

Scenario B – if you do teshuva out of *love for HKB"H* (scenario A is if you do teshuva because you fear HKB"H's wrath, מִיִּרְאָה), then not only is the sin erased, but it is converted into a ZCHUT!

When you get to the gate of Olam Habah and they tally ... "200 million zechuyot Reb Avraham, you may enter! You are seated in row two from the front." "What do you mean 200 million zechuyot? I never did a mitzva *my entire life*. In all my 96 years, I did nothing but sin. On my death bed I did teshuva and my sins were wiped clean. My tally should be ZERO!" Then the angel smiles and replies "Yes, Reb Avraham, but you did teshuva מְאֵהָבָה. Not only did your sins disappear, but they were converted into zechuyot according to today's current exchange rate!"

When last did anyone offer you a sweet deal like that? At the very least a clean slate, or best-case scenario - a suitcase full of treasures! Doesn't that make you want to *burst into song*? To sing thanks to HKB"H, in four-part harmony??

If that is the case (which it is), then why do we even need a stage 4 - קִבְּלָה לְעַתִּיד, resolving to never commit that sin again?

The answer is because it is *such a sweet deal*, that people will keep coming back for more. Sin, do teshuva מִיִּרְאָה, wipe the slate clean, sin, do teshuva מִיִּרְאָה, wipe the slate clean ... there would never ever be any incentive *not to sin*! People would be rushing to sin as much as they possibly could. Sinning makes you feel good – that is why people do it. If there is no accountability, you are guaranteed return customers. For this you need stage 4. "Disclaimer. This only works if you sincerely do teshuva and don't ever expect to repeat it again. If you *plan* to keep coming back and doing it again, the whole deal is off and the future teshuva won't work".

Or scenario B – sin, do teshuva מְאֵהָבָה, convert sins to zechuyot, sin, do teshuva מְאֵהָבָה, convert sins to zechuyot ... Keep going like that and you will end up in row *one* in Olam Habah, not row two! Same "Disclaimer" as above. If you want to accumulate zechuyot in future... *rather do mitzvot instead!*

In the stages of teshuva, the biggest hurdle is stage one – admitting you have sinned (to yourself). If you keep lying to yourself, you will never ever get to

do teshuva. Stage two is regretting the sin. This is the stage that involves the funeral cacophony, the wailing and pulling out of the hair. If it is sincere, HKB"H has *already forgiven you after stage 2*.

Stage 3 is gratitude for HKB"H's mercy. Song - singing Tum di dum di dum dum dum דִּבְרָנוּ דְּלִי בְּגִדְנוּ, אָשְׁמָנוּ, la la lala laaa! – in four-part harmony for the clean slate, or the suitcase full of zechuyot.

Stage 4. Is the Disclaimer you now "wear around your neck" as an everlasting reminder, so that you don't become a return customer.

Gratitude, thanks (epitomized by the mitzva of Bikkurim, תְּרוּמַת הַבִּכּוּרִים) - is a "revolution" because it is totally counterintuitive. By expressing thanks, we open the lock to HKB"H's "treasury of requests" and can request whatever we like... and we can expect our requests to be *granted* (תַּנְחוּמָא, פִּרְשֵׁת כִּי תְבוּאָה, סִימָן א').

If we are talking about "revolutions", then teshuva is the *father of all revolutions*. It is not תְּשׁוּבָה – *it precedes תְּשׁוּבָה*. The Gemara (פסחים נד, ע"א) says that teshuva was created even *before* תְּשׁוּבָה. In which other constellation can someone defy HKB"H their entire life and on their deathbed do teshuva מֵאֲהָרָה and ... all their red entries in the ledger move to the black column? No other "framework" besides HKB"H offers such a constellation.

This is why parshat Ki Tavo precedes the יָמִים נִזְרָאִים. The parsha begins with scenario B. (above), the אֲהָרָה scenario, the gratitude scenario, the preferred scenario. Later it also brings scenario A. (above), the יִרְאָה scenario in the קְלָלוֹת, not the preferred scenario, but the last line of defense.

On the subject of revolutions, let's remember another meaning of the word "revolution" – meaning "full circle". We have just under two weeks to ensure scenario B. and arrive at Rosh HaShana with a deep sense of gratitude to HKB"H, so that we will stand before Him - אַתֶּם נְצֻבִים הַיּוֹם בְּלִפְנֵי ה' – like angels, with a suitcase full of zechuyot and the promise of more.

Shabbat Shalom

Eliezer Meir Saidel

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