

Bikkurim Educate us in Good Middot

"It will be when you enter the Land that Hashem, your G-d, gives you as an inheritance, and you possess it, and dwell in it, that you shall take of the first of every fruit of the ground that you bring in from your Land that Hashem, your G-d, gives you, and you shall put it in a basket and go to the place that Hashem, your G-d, will choose, to make His name rest there."
(Devarim 26:1-2)

Chazal tell us (Megillah 10b): "The word 'והיה' (it will be) is always an expression of joy." Bringing Bikkurim must be performed with joy and gladness, for one cannot compare a servant who brings his master a gift with a sour expression on his face, to a servant who brings a gift with a shining, joyful countenance. Through bringing Bikkurim with joy a person thanks Hashem for all the good that He has bestowed upon him.

We will delve into this subject and pose the following question: Chazal say that the rich bring Bikkurim in gold and silver baskets, while the poor bring their offering in baskets woven from willow branches. What lies behind the idea of bringing one's Bikkurim in public? Why should Bikkurim not be brought in an opaque vessel, hidden from the public eye? When one brings the Bikkurim one recites the Torah passage (Devarim 26:5), "Then you shall call out and say before Hashem, your G-d, "An Aramean tried to destroy my forefather. He descended to Egypt and sojourned there, few in number..." We need to understand why we mention the experiences of our forefathers in Egypt and about Lavan the Aramean who wished to destroy Ya'akov Avinu. Why specifically when bringing Bikkurim is it appropriate to mention these facts?

We will clarify this issue, with Hashem's help. As we know, a person must constantly remember all the kindnesses that Hashem performs for him. The verse says (Tehillim 60:6), "To those who fear You, You gave a banner to be raised high" and Chazal expound on this: "If Hashem performs a miracle for a person and he acknowledges it, Hashem performs an additional miracle for him, for by expressing gratitude, a person proves that he is not ungrateful to the One who did those favors for him. This is the reason why Chazal established the blessing "Who bestows good things upon the guilty", to be recited by one for whom a miracle was performed. We also have a custom to invite people to a se'udat hoda'ya – a celebratory meal where we publicly express our thanks to Hashem for all the kindness that He did for us and we publicize His goodness. On Chanukah, too, we are commanded to publicize the miracle that we experienced in those days, for this is the correct way of expressing thanks.

A person's soul is greatly elevated by expressing appreciation. Through appreciating Hashem's goodness

and thanking Him for all His kindness, a person reaches the understanding that he has an obligation to fulfill the will of the One who performs this good and this will lead him to observe all of Hashem's commandments and laws, the 'minor' mitzvot as well as the 'major' mitzvot, with great scrupulousness and true desire. How can one defy the word of Hashem who in His great kindness performs so much good for him and how can he dare anger his Master and not fulfill His commandments? We find therefore that one who thanks Hashem merits an extra elevation in Torah and yirat shamayim and the diligence in performing mitzvot is immense.

This gives us an understanding of the mitzvah of Bikkurim. When a person is faced with his abundant crop and the choice fruits that grew in his fields, he is obligated to thank and praise Hashem and publicize His kindness. And if we are already praising Hashem, it is our obligation to mention His praise and all the kindnesses that He performed for us, from the moment when we became a nation. Therefore, at the same time that one mentions additional praise and admiration for all that we went through right from the times of our holy forefathers. We thank Hashem for saving Ya'akov from the hand of Lavan the Aramean who wished to kill him and we praise Hashem for redeeming us from Egypt where we were strangers in a non-Jewish land, under extreme conditions of servitude. Hashem, with His great kindness, took us out from darkness to light and from servitude to redemption and gave us the Promised Land. We do all this is because a man should remember and never forget all the kindnesses that Hashem performed for him.

This teaches us the great obligation to thank and praise our Creator for all the good that He performs for us from the day we were born until today. Immediately upon awakening in the morning, we open our mouths with an expression of thanks and recite, "I gratefully thank You, O living and eternal King, for You have returned my soul within me with compassion – abundant is Your faithfulness!" However, a person must contemplate if he is saying this with the true intent of the heart and understands the meaning of his words. Sleep is considered as one-sixtieth of death and now that Hashem has restored our faculties, we declare our gratitude. G-d forbid that this expression of thanks should be said out of habit, like mitzvot that a person is accustomed to performing by rote, for this cannot be considered as true appreciation.

May it be His will that we have the wisdom to always appreciate and express our thanks for the kindness of our Creator and may we fill our mouths with praise and recognition, as David Hamelech a"h said: (Tehillim 150:6) "Let all souls praise G-d, Halleluyah!"

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Hilula

21 - Rabbi Yehonatan Eibeshitz

22 - Rabbi Yehuda ben Simchan

23 - Rabbi Uri, the 'Saraf of Strelisk'

24 - Rabbi Yisrael Meir HaKohen, the 'Chafetz Chaim'

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Walking in their Ways

Tidbits of faith and trust penned by Moreinu v'Rabbeinu Hagoan Hatzaddik Rabbi David Chananya Pinto, shlita

Challot in Honor of Shabbat

On my visit to Hong Kong, an elderly non-observant woman approached me with a strange request: "Rabbi, I want a blessing that I should die."

"A blessing that you should die?!" I asked, incredulously. "Dying before one's time is not a blessing, but a curse. Why do you wish to incur a curse upon yourself?"

The woman contended that she was fed up with her life of emptiness. She preferred death over a life without purpose.

I tried to understand why her life lacked direction. I discovered that she was fantastically wealthy and even owned a private jet. But she found no meaning in her pampered life of pleasure and indulgence.

I suggested that she begin baking challot in honor of Shabbat. I hoped that this would add a bit of meaning and interest to her dreary life.

The woman looked at me with wide-open eyes. "Maybe the Rav did not fully understand me," she began. "I don't even prepare my own coffee! All of my wishes are fulfilled by my private staff. I never lift a finger in my house. How in the world am I expected to bake challot?"

I stood my ground. I explained to her that she wished to end her life because she had never accustomed herself to hard work and she was fed up with her life of gaiety. True vacation belongs to the one who has a vocation. The one who reaps the fruits of his labor is the happy person. Her life seemed rosy and fun, but it was merely a cover for hollowness and futility.

Baking challot for Shabbat would fill her with purpose and the joy of working toward a goal. Thoughts of death would leave her as quickly as they had come. The woman accepted my advice.

After some time, she phoned me. "Honored Rav," she began, "your advice worked wonders! I am shocked at the transformation that I underwent. From the day I began baking challot, I was filled with fulfillment and love of life. Baking challot for Shabbat led me to observe Shabbat."

Baruch Hashem, this woman now leads a productive life. She has no time to contemplate morbid thoughts of death.



Words of our Sages

Prayer for Every Aspect in Life

"And Hashem heard our voice" (Devarim 26:7)

The Steipler zt"l was accustomed to telling those who approached him for a blessing: "Don't wait for someone else to pray for you. Pray for yourself, and know that prayer always helps. Every single prayer. There is no such thing as a prayer that goes unanswered! Such a concept does not exist!"

How fortunate is the person who understands that he can turn to Hashem for every single need and pour out his soul before Him!

The Admor Rabbi David of Lalov once approached his friend and told him that he wished to spend the night in his house so that the following morning they could travel together to their Rebbe, the Chozeh of Lublin zya"l.

The friend hurried to tell his wife about the distinguished guest that would be coming to stay in their home so that she should prepare a befitting meal. The husband did not know that the house was empty, save for a bit of flour... and what can one make from flour alone?

The righteous wife did not make too many calculations. She took the small scraps of leftovers that she had in the house and mixed them together with flour and water, without the addition of oil or spices, and served their guest this concoction...

The Rebbe of Lalov ate this 'delicacy' and was greatly satisfied. Immediately following this repast, he travelled to Lublin together with his host.

When he returned home, the Rebbe told his wife with amazement: When I was at my friend's house, they served me a hot dish which tasted like Gan Eden!

The Rabbanit was well aware that her husband the tzaddik was far from enjoying the pleasures of this world, so she hurried to ask the hostess for the 'recipe' of this dish that she had served and that her husband had praised so highly.

Her friend replied: "We are very poor and I didn't have anything with which to make a tasty meal. Suddenly my husband approached me and announced that he is bringing a distinguished visitor to eat in our home. What did I do? I took whatever I had in the house, and while preparing the food I lifted up my heart to heaven and prayed from the depths of my heart to the One who dwells Above:

"Please Hashem, You know that I wouldn't scrimp on spices to give the tzaddik pleasure. But what should I do? I don't have anything in the house. Yet You, Hashem, have an entire Gan Eden. Please see your maidservant's distress and place a bit of the taste of Gan Eden into the dish that I am preparing, so that I will merit bringing pleasure to the tzaddik and I will not be embarrassed in front of him.

The prayer flowed from the depths of my heart. Hashem answered my prayer and indeed the dish was spiced with the taste of Gan Eden..."

The Haftarah

"Arise! Shine!" (Yeshaya 60)



The connection to Shabbat: This Haftarah is the sixth of the seven special 'Haftarot of Comfort' that are read starting with the Shabbat following Tisha B'Av. They are chapters of comfort for the Jewish people.

Guard Your Tongue

His Face Will Shine Like the Light of the Sun

If, by keeping quiet and not speaking lashon hara, a person is 'rewarded' with words of humiliation, he should know that in this merit he will in the future be considered as belonging to those who love Hashem and his face will shine like the light of the sun, as Chazal (Shabbat 88b) tell us, "Those who are insulted but do not insult, who bear their disgrace yet do not reply...about them the verse says 'And let those who love Him be like the powerfully rising sun' (Shoftim 5.31)". All the more so is this applicable to one who suffers disgrace for the sake of performing a mitzvah.



Pearls of the Parshah

Rejoice with the Torah

"You shall rejoice with all the good that Hashem, your G-d, has given you" (Devarim 26:11)

Rabbeinu Chaim ben Attar zya"l, (the 'Ohr Hachaim Hakadosh') offers us great encouragement for joy in our avodat Hashem, with his famous words that we should constantly repeat to ourselves:

"אין טוב אלא תורה שאם היו בני אדם מרגישים במתיקות ועריבות טוב התורה היו משתגעים ומתלהטים אחריה ולא יחשב בעיניהם מלא עולם כסף וזהב למאומה כי התורה כוללת כל הטובות שבעולם."

"There is no 'goodness' but for Torah. If people would only feel the sweetness and pleasantness of Torah, they would be fervent and passionate about it and an entire world of silver and gold would be considered worthless in their eyes, for the Torah includes all the goodness in the world".

Why Did the Vilna Gaon Faint?

"I have not transgressed any of Your commandments, and I have not forgotten" (Devarim 26:13)

The above verse is explained by the sefer 'M'aznei Tzedek' who quotes the opinion of the Rama: A person only commits an unintentional sin if he has previously committed an intentional sin, since "one sin leads to another sin".

This is the meaning of the verse: "I have not transgressed any of Your commandments"- on purpose, "and I have not forgotten"- by mistake. Since I did not perform an intentional sin, it did not happen that I forgot and transgressed a commandment unintentionally.

This teaches us that a person never commits an unintentional sin if he hasn't previously committed that sin purposely!

In a similar vein, there is a story told about the Vilna Gaon who once touched an orange peel on Shabbat and thinking that he had touched a muktzah item (items set aside and forbidden from touching on Shabbat), he immediately fainted.

His attendants tried to arouse him yet he once again fainted. His wife took the peel, ate it and said to him: "This is food, it is not muktzah!" and with these words, he was placated.

It seems hard to understand why the Gaon fainted. Did he not touch the orange peel by mistake?

The answer is, Rabbi Mordechai Mann zt"l explains, as we clarified above.

There is no such thing as an unintentional sin without this sin being committed intentionally on a previous occasion. Had the person not previously committed this transgression on purpose, he would not have come to commit this act by mistake.

As the Number of Days in the Year

"Then all the peoples of the earth will see that the Name of Hashem is proclaimed over you, and they will revere you" (Devarim 28:10)

Chazal expound (Berachot 6a) on the words, "the name of Hashem is proclaimed over you": "There is a Breitha, Rabbi Eliezer Hagadol says that this refers to tefillin shel rosh (tefillin worn on the forehead).

The first letters of the words 'שם ה' נקרא' (the Name of Hashem is proclaimed) are ש"י (with 'Hashem' spelt as is written in the Torah). Rabbi Chaim of Prague zt"l, author of "Igeret Hatiyul", says that this is a hint that the letter 'shin' on the tefillin shel rosh is that which will frighten the nations.

Also, the letter 'shin', which has a numerical value of three hundred, is found on the tefillin, which is a hint that one lays tefillin on three hundred days out of the year.

What is the calculation?

There are three hundred and sixty-five days in a year and on the following days we do not lay tefillin: Fifty-two Shabbatot, the two days of Rosh Hashana, one day of Yom Kippur, four days of Sukkot, (the two first and last days as celebrated in Chutz L'aretz and according to the opinion that one lays tefillin on chol hamo'ed), the four days of Pesach (two first and last days) and the two days of Shavuot. This amounts to sixty-five days.

We are left, then, with three hundred days in the year on which we adorn ourselves with the crown of tefillin.

Treasures

Based on the teachings of
Moreinu v'Rabbeinu Hagaon
Hatzaddik Rabbi David Chananya
Pinto, shlita



The Main Goal in True Repentance

The Gaon Rabbi Yechezkel Levenstein zt"l, the Mashgiach ruchani of the Ponivezh Yeshiva, would say that although it is true that during the month of Elul- the month of mercy and forgiveness- a person is inspired and aroused more than during the rest of the year, nevertheless one must take great care that this inspiration should not be superficial or meaningless, rather man is obligated to also arouse the inner feelings of his heart. The reason why we do not fear the Day of Judgement is that we are missing the inner awakening which comes from the depths of the heart.

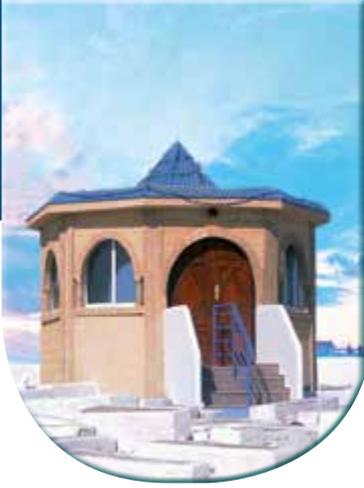
We will expand a little on this idea:

It could very well be that in Chodesh Elul a person truly desires to repent and tries to ascend the ladder of spiritual growth. He may awaken early each morning to say the selichot prayers and cry out, "Master of forgiveness, who examines the heart" and so forth. Afterwards, he recites the shacharit prayer from beginning to end. Nevertheless, it could still be that he is very far from true repentance, for inside his heart there is no awakening. Deep in his heart, there is no positive change.

Although he carries out external acts of repentance by praying well and reciting the selichot, a person must know that he must straighten the crookedness of his heart and rid himself of undesirable traits such as pride, jealousy and competition. He must destroy his negative desires and distance foreign thoughts from his mind. This is the proper effort, it is work that comes from deep inside the heart and it is this which is considered genuine repentance. One who is successful in this will certainly feel the fear of the Day of Judgement and the fear of G-d will enter his heart.

Following the selichot prayers, we blow the shofar. The word 'שוֹפָר' (shofar) comes from the same root as 'שִׁפוּר' (to improve). We must improve our ways, rectify our mid-dot and distance the bad from ourselves and draw nearer to the good. This should be our main goal and this is the correct form of repentance.

May the Memory of a Tzaddik Be for a Blessing The Esteemed Rabbi Chaim Pinto Hagadol zya"a In Honor of his Hilula, 26 Elul (September 26th, 2019)



The pure, untainted light of the ner ma'aravi, the tzaddik and mekubal, the holy Rabbi Chaim Pinto Hagadol zya"a, was accorded worldwide fame already from his youth, when he accepted upon himself and accustomed himself to a life of Torah and holiness, which he absorbed from the house of his holy fathers zya"a. He was famous in all the Jewish communities throughout Morocco, and even the non-Jews accorded him much honor, considering him as a holy person who was capable of performing miracles.

The blessings that were offered from the tzaddik's pure mouth, brought about miracles and salvation as in the concept of "A tzaddik decrees and Hashem fulfills". These miracles and salvation are experienced still today by the many people who visit his holy kever and beseech before our Father in Heaven that He should bless them with salvation in the merit of the tzaddik and miracle worker, Maran Rabbi Chaim Pinto zya"a.

Moreinu v'Rabbeinu Rabbi David Chananya Pinto shlita once told over a story that happened with his holy grandfather, Rabbeinu Chaim Pinto zya"a, which shows the fulfillment of the verse, "Then all the peoples of the earth will see that the Name of Hashem is proclaimed over you, and they will revere you" (Devarim 28:10).

The esteemed Rabbeinu Chaim Pinto zya"a had a righteous son called Rabbi Yehuda Pinto zt"l, who in his youth was cursed by a non-Jewish child. The young Yehuda responded by picking up a stone and flinging it at the child's forehead, which began to bleed.

This non-Jewish child was none other than the son of the mayor who was known for his tremendous hatred of the Jews. When he heard that Rabbi Chaim's son had injured his child, he rejoiced at the opportunity to repay the Jews with suffering. He immediately set out for Rabbi Chaim's zya"a house, but upon entering and coming face to face with the Rav sitting and delving into the Torah, he immediately retreated and quickly left the room.

When those who accompanied the mayor asked him to explain why he fled, he explained that he saw a light shining from the Rav's face, and was afraid to disturb him in case this would bring him harm. Not only did he return quietly to his home, but also, he sent presents to Rabbi Chaim zya'a so that he should not hold it against him for disturbing him.

Rabbi Chaim sent for the mayor who arrived with shaking knees and with great trepidation. Rabbi Chaim asked him to explain the purpose of his visit that morning, to which the mayor replied – "It was nothing important, there was a small fight between our children but everything is okay now." This shows us, tangibly, that when a tzaddik learns Torah, he ascends and becomes attached to the Names of Hashem, which causes all the nations of the world to revere him.

I Will Not Leave You

The ner ma'aravi was extinguished on the twenty-sixth of Elul, 5605, not before the tzaddik requested from his talmidim to continue strengthening themselves in guarding the Torah and fulfilling the mitzvot, explicitly promising them:

"Know, my beloved students! I will continue to stand before Hakadosh Baruch Hu in prayer after my death, just as I did while I was alive. I will not forsake you in my death, just as I did not forsake you during my lifetime."

Rabbi Chaim zya"a, was buried in the old cemetery in Mogador. May his merit protect us together with all of Am Yisrael, for good and blessings. May we merit being written and sealed in the Book of Life and Peace and rejoice in the final redemption, Amen.

