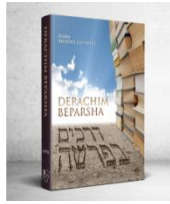


דרכים בפרשה כי תבוא

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הגדתי היום לה' אלקיך כי באתי אל הארץ אשר נשבע ה' לאבותינו לתת לנו

*I declare today to Hashem your G-d that I have come to the
land that Hashem swore to our forefathers to give us*

There is something unusual about the mitzvah of bikurim. The Torah says, **והיה כי תבוא אל הארץ אשר ה' אלקיך נתן לך נחלה**, and then commands a person to take the first fruits of his field and bring them to Yerushalayim. When he arrives, he makes a declaration: **הגדתי היום לה' אלקיך כי באתי אל הארץ אשר נשבע ה' לאבותינו לתת לנו**. “I declare today to Hashem your G-d that I have come to the land that Hashem swore to our forefathers to give us.”

But why is this needed? He is already standing in Eretz Yisroel. He has a field, his field has produced fruit, and he is literally holding the evidence that Hashem's promise has been fulfilled. Why does he need to announce that he has come to the land?

The Ramban explains that through the fruit he brings, a person is thanking Hashem for bringing him into Eretz Yisroel and fulfilling His promise. The bikurim are therefore not simply a gift to Hashem. The fruit itself becomes an expression of hakaras hatov. But perhaps there is something deeper hidden in the timing of the mitzvah. The Torah is not asking him to thank Hashem while he is still waiting for the harvest. He is asked to thank Hashem *after* the bracha has arrived.

This brings us back to something we discussed in Parshas Vayeitzei. The Gemara in Berachos (7b) says that from the beginning of creation, nobody had thanked Hashem until Leah came and said, **הפעם אודה את ה'**. But how can that be? Adam Harishon, Noach and the Avos had certainly expressed gratitude to Hashem. The Ksav Sofer explains that the greatness of Leah was not simply that she said thank you. She was the first to recognize Hashem's kindness in something that could easily be taken for granted.

This is reflected in the Gemara in Shabbos (118b), which says, **הקורא הלל בכל יום הרי זה מחרף ומגדף**. Why would someone who praises Hashem every day be considered to be doing something wrong? The Ksav Sofer explains that Hallel is the appropriate response to an open, supernatural neis. But if a person only recognizes Hashem when something extraordinary happens, while failing to recognize Him in the ordinary events of life, there is something fundamentally wrong with his gratitude.

Leah had already received three children. When her fourth child was born, she said **הפעם אודה את ה'**. She was able to experience another child not as “another one,” but as another gift. Her greatness was that the fourth bracha had not become ordinary.

And perhaps bikurim takes that idea one step further.

It is one thing to recognize a bracha when it first arrives. It is another thing to continue recognizing it after it has become part of everyday life. The farmer bringing bikurim is not standing in his field watching the first fruit suddenly appear. He has spent months planting, waiting and watching things grow. By now, the miracle has become a process. What was once extraordinary has become routine. And precisely then the Torah tells him to take the first fruits, put them into a basket, travel to Yerushalayim and announce, **הגדתי היום**.

Remember! Look at what you have and remember where it came from.

This may be one of the greatest challenges of *hakaras hatov*. The greatest threat to gratitude is not necessarily losing a bracha. Sometimes it is simply getting used to one. If our car suddenly disappeared for three days and then came back, we would probably call it a neis. When it starts every morning for the next three thousand days, we call it Tuesday.

We do this with so much in life. We once davened desperately for something, and when Hashem finally gave it to us, we were overwhelmed with gratitude. A few years later, it has become part of the furniture. We once looked at our family and felt incredibly fortunate. Eventually, we are mostly asking them to put their shoes away. The bracha did not become smaller. We simply became accustomed to it.

Chazal tell us, **על כל נשימה ונשימה תהלל י-ה**. Every breath is worthy of praise. Yet we rarely stop to appreciate the fact that we are breathing. We wait for something dramatic to happen before recognizing Hashem's kindness, while the greatest kindnesses are happening quietly all day long.

Perhaps this is particularly relevant as we enter Elul. We naturally begin thinking about what we need to change. What are we missing? What should we improve? What new kabbalah should we make? But perhaps before we make a list of everything that isn't right, we should stop and look at everything that is.

What did I once daven for that I don't even think about anymore? What do I have today that the person I was ten years ago would have been overwhelmed to receive? Which brachos have become so familiar that I no longer recognize them as brachos?

Maybe we don't always need a new bracha. Sometimes we need to rediscover the brachos we already have.

Leah taught us not to stop saying thank you when the brachos keep coming. Bikurim teaches us something even more difficult: *don't stop appreciating the brachos once you've gotten used to them*.

The Torah therefore tells the farmer to stop, take his first fruits, and remember: **הגדתי היום לה' אלקיך כי באתי אל הארץ**. I have arrived. I have been given what I once only hoped for. And I don't want the fact that it has become normal to make me forget how extraordinary it really is.

Sometimes the greatest change we can make is not to receive something new, but to look at something we already have and finally realize what a gift it is.

מרדכי אפפעל, Good Shabbos,