



**SERMON RESOURCE FOR SHLUCHIM**  
**KI TAVO / כי תבוא**  
**INDEBTED FOREVER**

**DISTRIBUTION DATE:**

**TUESDAY SEPTEMBER 16, 2008 / ט"ז אלול תשס"ח**

**PARSHA:**

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**SERMON TITLE:**

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Jews have different kinds of greetings that just can't be found in other languages. For example: "Until 120." In the Old Country, when you ask an elderly Jew his age, if you want a response, you must add "until 120" to the question. Only then will you get an answer.

Another example is wishing parents to have "much nachas." This is an expression that every Jew knows, regardless of what language he or she speaks. And finally, "Yasher koach," or, as most of us pronounce it: "Shkoiyach!"

Our parshah this week teaches us yet another bona fide Jewish expression that's used at least once a year.

We read about the "first fruits" this week: the so-called Bikkurim. In the agricultural society of Temple times, Jewish growers would tie ribbons over the first fruits to appear in their orchards as harvest seasons began. When they ripened, they'd be picked and placed in designated baskets and then brought to the Temple and presented to the priests.

In reality, the holiday of Shavuos is called the Bikkurim Festival, because that's when the entire Jewish nation would bring their Bikkurim to the Temple. The



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Mishnah in Tractate Bikkurim (Chapter 3, Mishna 2 through 6), describes the bringing of these first fruits as a major operation.

All residents of small villages would first assemble in the nearest big city. In the morning, an announcement would be called out: "Arise! Let us go up to Zion, to the House of Hashem!" A complete march would follow. At its head would march an ox with horns overlaid in gold. As they approached Jerusalem, messengers would be dispatched to notify the city that the march was nearing the gates. When they arrived, the city's residents would come out to greet them and receive them with great honor. When they arrived at the Temple Mount, every marcher would put his fruit basket on his shoulder and enter the Azarah, the Temple's courtyard. There, he would give thanks to G-d for all the good He gave: a portion in the Holy Land, and the merit to see fruits from his own field.

To all this, Rashi in our parshah has this to add: "After one fulfilled the mitzvah of bringing Bikkurim, a Heavenly Voice would bless him, saying, 'You brought Bikkurim today, and you shall repeat it next year' " (Devarim 26:16). In other words, G-d would bless him that in the merit of observing the mitzvah that year, he would merit to fulfill it again the coming year.

Now, the Rebbe points out (in Likutei Sichos Vol. 19, pg. 228): Throughout the Torah, wherever it speaks of the reward and blessing for keeping the mitzvos, the Torah explicitly promises a reward, whether to the individual, such as long life for honoring one's parents, or to the entire nation, such as receiving rain for observing



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the mitzvos. However, the wording “You shall repeat it next year” is not found as a blessing for any other mitzvah. Clearly, then, we are dealing with a type of special greeting without comparison, a blessing which states: “You did good this year—you’ll merit to do it next year.” ( Tizkeh L’shana Habaah )

The question is thus left: Why is the mitzvah of Bikkurim so unique that only at Bikkurim is there a Heavenly Voice calling out this blessing that is not found with any other mitzvah?

So let’s take a moment here to contemplate what exactly is the essence of the mitzvah of Bikkurim.

Essentially, Bikkurim is giving thanks to G-d for all the good He gives us—so what’s so special about this mitzvah? Don’t we give thanks to G-d every day for everything He gives us? What is Birkas Hamazon, the after-meal prayers, if not saying thanks for the food He has given us? What is the Modeh Ani, if not the recognition of G-d granting us a new day of life every morning? And so on and so forth—a Jew hardly takes a single step without thanking G-d for every breath. So what’s so special about saying thanks with the mitzvah of Bikkurim?

Many years ago, a prominent shliach was involved in a deadly car accident which tragically killed him on the spot. At the “shloshim” gathering, marking thirty days since his passing, a huge memorial event was organized in his city to remember him, with the participation of many local residents.



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Many of the shliach's closest congregants spoke about him and recalled their memories. However, one of these speakers remains well engraved in my memory.

This speaker was a physician in another town, and somehow had formed a connection with the shliach, who had offered to study Torah personally with him. The doctor agreed.

The first time the shliach appeared at the doctor's home, he didn't just take one book for the study session out of the car—he took out an entire library. This is what he told the doctor: "It's better for you to have a lot of books in your house. This way, you can learn by yourself, even when I'm not around." And so, slowly but surely, they began studying and progressing together.

One day, the subject matter revolved around childbirth. The doctor told the shliach that they had two kids with whom they were very satisfied, and had decided not to have any more. The doctor's wife had even undergone surgery to prevent further pregnancy. The shliach began speaking about the importance of bringing Jewish children into the world, and how dear they are in G-d's Eyes. Slowly, he convinced them to have more kids, and indeed, the wife underwent a second operation to make further childbearing possible.

All this was being recounted by the doctor in his speech. He then suddenly cried out: "I will forever be indebted to the dear departed rabbi for the three more children added to our family by his advice!" It was no ordinary thank you, but



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something far greater—for every time he'd see or think about those kids, he would again feel thankful to the rabbi.

We might say that this is the difference between an ordinary thank you and acknowledging an everlasting good. Every civilized human being says “thank you.” When one wants to change the subject or end the conversation, one says “thank you” and both parties move on. However, when one is bound in gratitude to another—now that's something else entirely. In that case, he doesn't try to escape, but rather, feels even greater gratitude every time he ponders or thinks about what the other did. For example, if a man rescues a child from drowning, G-d forbid, every time that child's parents meet the rescuer, they thank him again and again; when they marry off that child, they invite their hero to the wedding and shower him with words of thanks and blessing; and when that child has a son of his own, the rescuer is invited to the bris, the circumcision. The thanks only grows and increases as the years go by.

The Rebbe's father lived in Russia during the difficult years of Communism, and indeed, he was arrested and banished to exile, where he bore indescribable suffering to the extent that he took sick and passed away. One of the only Chasidim with the Rebbe's father at the time, who helped him, was a Jew named Rabbi Yosef Nimotin. After many years, he personally merited to leave Russia and emigrate to the United States, where he lived next door to 770 Eastern Parkway, Lubavitch World Headquarters.

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Whenever the Rebbe saw him, he would thank him for the help he gave his father, and every year at his father's yahrzeit farbrengen, or Chasidic gathering, the Rebbe would draw him close and shower honor upon him. At one of these occasions, the Rebbe said, "I owe him a lot for his helping my father—and I never want to be done paying."

This, my friends, is the mitzvah of Bikkurim. It's not about giving a dry "thank you." It's constantly and perpetually recognizing the good that continues forever. And it is just such a sentiment that G-d blesses with "You shall repeat it next year."

Nowadays we use this greeting at Simchas Torah. When a participant carries the Torah scroll during Hakafof, the circular dances in the synagogue, we bless him as he passes by: "May you live another year." Perhaps we can say that on Simchas Torah, the Jew expresses his feelings of thanks to G-d for providing us with the Torah. But he is not satisfied with just saying thanks like he says every day in the morning blessing that thanks G-d for giving us the Torah. Rather, he steps out of the box to dance and rejoice with the Torah, demonstrating the extent of his bond of gratitude to G-d for giving us the Torah—and as a result of such gratitude, he earns the blessing "May you live another year."

So, what are our Bikkurim? There is nothing more important to a person than his or her children, which fill his or her entire world. And when we bring our children to this shul as we once brought Bikkurim to the Holy Temple, we merit the blessing "You shall repeat it next year."

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