



BS"D

To: parsha@groups.io

From: Chaim Shulman
<cshulman@gmail.com>

INTERNET PARSHA SHEET ON KI SAVO - 5786

parsha@groups.io / www.parsha.net - in our 31st year! To receive this parsha sheet, go to <http://www.parsha.net> and click Subscribe or send a blank e-mail to parsha+subscribe@groups.io. Please also copy me at cshulman@gmail.com. A complete archive of previous issues is now available at <http://www.parsha.net>. It is also fully searchable.

In memory of Chaim Yissachar z"l ben Yechiel Zaydel Dov

To sponsor a parsha sheet contact cshulman@gmail.com
(proceeds to tzedaka)

Table of Contents:

- R' Hershel Schachter on Training Ourselves in Ha'koras Ha'tov
- R' Assaf Bednarsh on Simcha In Mitzvos
- R' Yehuda Nachshoni on The Meaning of the Curses in Ki Savo
- R' Dr. Kenneth Brander on Prophecy Being Fulfilled Today
- R' S. Y. Zevin on Elevating Our Hands, Answering Our Blessings
- R' Frand on Here We Are Allowed to Claim Our Reward
- R' YY Jacobson on Confessing Your Greatness
- wikiyeshiva misc. ideas on Parshas Ki Savo

from: TorahWeb <torahweb@torahweb.org>

date: Aug 27, 2026, 11:22 AM

Rav Hershel Schachter

Training Ourselves in Ha'koras Ha'tov

Parshas Ki Savo begins with the mitzvah of bikurim, which has two parts. First, bikurim is one of the twenty-four matanos which we give to the Kohanim. Shevet Levi did not get a share in Eretz Yisroel because the Kohanim and le'vi'im are supposed to take care of the Beis Ha'mikdash, so we're commanded to give the Kohanim twenty-four matanos. Secondly, when the farmers bring bikurim to the Beis Ha'mikdash, they recite "Arami oveid avi". Rashi, in his commentary on that posuk, quotes Sifrei's explanation that the idea behind mikra bikurim is to express our thanks to Hashem for the bountiful year. In another two places in Chumash Devarim, the Torah instructs us that after being blessed with a successful year in parnassa, we should not forget that the source of all the parnassa is Hashem. In Parshas Va'eschanan (6:12) the Torah warns us not to forget that after receiving a successful parnassa, we should be careful not to forget about Hashem. The same idea is repeated in Parshas Eikev (8:14), i.e. that we should not become arrogant and forget about Hashem. One of the ba'alei ha'Tosfos, Rabbi Moshe from Kutzi, wrote the sefer known as Sefer Mitzvos Gadol (a.k.a. Smag). After completing

the entire sefer he had a dream that one of the mitzvos in the Torah came to him and complained why it was left out from the count of the mitzvos in the sefer. The next day, the Smag reviewed the Chumash again and realized that he left out this mitzvah that appears in Va'eschanan, Eikev, and in Parshas Shoftim (18:20) that the king has to have a small sefer Torah with him at all times which he must use to learn every day and every night in order that his position should not go to his head and he not become arrogant and forget all about Hashem. (This mitzvah #64 of the lavim is based on a Gemarah in the beginning of Sotah).

Hashem is invisible so it is very easy to forget about him. The mitzvah of "Anochi Hashem Elokecha" does not mean that we should believe in the existence of Hashem, because if He does not exist, then there is no one there to give us any commandments! (As the Ramban points out in his commentary on the Rambam's Sefer Ha'mitzvos). Rather, the nature of the mitzvah of Anochi really is, as the possuk reads in Tehillim, "Shivisi Hashem l'negdi tamid", i.e. to keep in the forefront of our minds that Hashem is always present, and we must act and speak accordingly. Based on this mitzvah, we should have the attitude that Hashem is at the center of everything that is happening in the world. Arrogant people who think highly of themselves always visualize as if they are in the center of everything that is happening in the world and that everything revolves around them. That is why the Smag formulated this new mitzvah that one should not be arrogant in order that he should not forget Hashem. The Mishna (Pirkei Avos, chapter 3) teaches us that when we give tzedakah, we should not have the attitude that this money is my hard-earned money, and I have the right to distribute my charity wherever I please. "Tain lo mi shelo" - we should view it as if we are merely an apitropis (guardian) on Hashem's money, because Hashem is the one who gave us the chochmah to earn all the money and, as we say in the Selichos prayers, "ha'neshoma lach v'haguf sh'lach; our bodies belong to Hashem and the chochmah that we have is all from Hashem. Therefore all of our earnings really belong to Hashem. The Gemarah (Baba Kama) records a popular expression: when one goes to a wedding the wine is paid for by the baalei simcha, the waiters are salaried to serve the wine, and the waiters are tipped in addition, and still, we say thank you to the waiter when he pours us some wine. The Chachomim felt that it is very important to always express gratitude to others. One can always explain away why there is no need to thank others for anything they do for us, since there is always reciprocity in human relations - I do for others in exchange for them doing do for me. And yet, the chachomim felt that because Hashem is invisible and we can easily forget about him, it is important that we always insist on ha'koras ha'tov towards other human beings to make sure that we don't forget about Hashem. The Gemarah (end of Berachos) discusses the text of the bracha of "nishmas kol chai", which is really the beginning of Yishtabach. There are two girsa'os in the text of the Gemarah, the one followed by Ashkenazim and one followed by Sefardim. In nusach Ashkenaz, we recite the text which says that Hashem is, "mehulal b'rv ha'tishbachos - praised by us with a majority of the praises". The nusach Sefard girsa in the Gemarah comes to the conclusion that we ought not say that expression because it implies that Hashem does not deserve all of the praises, only the majority of the praises. The reading in the text of the Gemarah that the chamei Ashkenaz had was that because of this objection we mention both expressions: "Melech

mehulal b'tishbochos - the King who is praised with all of the praises", as well as "ha'mehulal b'rov ha'tishbochos". Rav Soloveitchik suggested that the nusach Ashkenaz may be teaching us that perhaps it is not such a smart idea to reserve all the praises for Hashem. Because He is invisible, He can easily be forgotten about. Therefore, we should get used to expressing ha'koras ha'tov to other human beings, even if they really don't deserve it due to there being reciprocity anyway, because we must strengthen this important middah of ha'koras ha'tov, so that we have will proper ha'koras ha'tov vis-a-vis Hashem which, in turn, strengthens our emunah in Him, specifically our recognition that He is the center of everything in the world.

© 2026 by TorahWeb Foundation. All Rights Reserved Our mailing address is: TorahWeb.org 94 Baker Ave Bergenfield, NJ 07621-3321

from: YUTorah <yutorah@comms.yu.edu>

date: Aug 27, 2026, 5:37 PM

Simcha In Mitzvos

Rabbi Assaf Bednarsh

(Transcribed and adapted by a talmid, with a suite of AI tools, from the YUTorah shiur presented at Gruss Kollel in Yerushalayim on September 12, 2025)

One of the more interesting psukim in the Tochacha of this week's Parshah is: *Tachas asher lo avad'ta es Hashem Elokecha be-simchah u-ve-tuv leivav mei-rov kol*. Why did Hashem punish you? The Torah explains that you did not serve Him with simchah ve-tuv leivav—meaning joy and gladness of heart—despite having rov kol—an abundance of everything. But how do we understand the simchah and tuv leivav mentioned here?

The Abarbanel, Bechor Shor, and others offer the simplest pshat. The Torah suggests that it's a serious offense not to serve Hashem when you experience happiness and ease in life.

However, the Rambam explains differently at the very end of his Hilchos Lulav—in the Mishneh Torah—and the Rabbeinu Bechaye seconds it here. You will not be punished because you didn't serve Hashem when you had simchah, and everything was easy. You did serve Hashem. But you will suffer all these terrible curses because you didn't serve Hashem with joy and gladness. The Rambam—despite his reputation as an arch-intellectual—believes that it's an avodah gedolah to serve Hashem be-simchah. And he adds, Even if you do all Taryag (613) Mitzvos, you'll be punished if you serve Hashem without simchah—because the Torah clearly says, *Tachas asher lo avadta es Hashem Elokecha be-simchah u-ve-tuv leivav*. And if you do not do the Mitzvos with joy and gladness of heart, then, chas ve-shalom, Hashem views it as exceedingly blameworthy. However, the Rambam doesn't fully explain what the big deal is with serving Hashem with simcha. Neglecting to serve Hashem at all contradicts kol ha-Torah kulah. And I understand serving Hashem without joy is not the highest madreigah. But is that a reason for such a harsh punishment? And I've seen two explanations.

There's a famous mesorah from Rav Moshe Feinstein. Back in the days when America was vastly different, it was very challenging to be a frum Jew in America—especially because you couldn't keep a steady job if you didn't work on Shabbos. Staying observant and keeping Shabbos required significant self-sacrifice. And Rav Moshe noted that in some families, the kids grew up to be tzaddikim because they saw mesirus nefesh. Yet, the kids of the family next door, grew up completely assimilated and rejected Judaism completely—despite

the parent's mesiras nefesh for Shabbos. And Rav Moshe explains that one father exclaimed, Ah, Torah, Yiddishkeit, and Shabbos are so geshmak! It makes my life so great! However, the other father bemoaned, Shver tzu zein a Yid—Ah, it's so tough to be a Jew. The father meant that while it is challenging to be a Jew, it is also rewarding. However, the kids only heard the negativity. If Yiddishkeit is so tough—they reasoned—why do I want to be a Yid? And when they grew up, they abandoned Yiddishkeit wholesale. Therefore, the implication is, If you serve Hashem be-simchah, you will pass it to the next generation. Otherwise, eventually it will become boring and burdensome, and they will discard it. And consequently, that will lead to the curses mentioned in the Tochacha. But Rav Moshe just shared an observation—a true observation. He did not intend it as a peirush of the Rambam.

The Rambam may have meant something philosophically deeper. What's the difference between oved Hashem be-simchah and oved Hashem without simchah? When I serve Hashem be-simchah, I internalize the mitzvos that I do. I connect with the Torah and mitzvos. Being be-simchah means you're doing something personally meaningful—something that brings out your essence. When I genuinely believe in something, I connect to it and engage in it with joy. Why would I do something without simchah? Because I'm forced by circumstances beyond my control. Some people love their work. They believe in it and are excited and happy to do it. And others work because they don't want the bank to foreclose on their house and leave them on the street. They feel that the annoying work is the only way to avoid negative consequences.

Yes, even if you keep kol ha-Torah kulah without simchah, that means you're keeping it because Hashem is more powerful than you—and you have no way out. You don't believe the Torah speaks to your neshamah. You don't believe that it adds meaning to your life. You don't connect to it. You're doing it because of an external threat—and the mitzvos become almost worthless. Therefore, we can understand how the curses of the Tochachah result from the lack of simchah in avodas Hashem.

So it's not a coincidence—as the Gemara says—that we hear the Tochachah specifically in Elul. It prepares us to begin living in a manner that will eliminate all the curses of this year and bring only the blessings we so desperately need. We must, of course, relate to this explanation on multiple levels. Number one: Appreciate the fact that we have a zechus to serve Hashem. It's not always so demanding. Hashem helps us. So we don't always need to be moseir nefesh. Think about it. Hashem is making it easy for me. He's given me a supportive family and a supportive chevra. And nowadays, I don't have to worry about working on Shabbos. Or perhaps I don't have to worry about working because my parents support me in kollel forever—and I can be oved Hashem be-simchah. Therefore, say, Thank You, Hashem! You gave me simchah, and I will serve you. And when you are oved Hashem, don't do it as something external that you must do. There are some laws that you must observe because they're on the books. That's called Secular Law. But the Torah is not just a collection of laws that I must observe or else the police are going to arrest me. To truly internalize Torah, take a moment to pause and reflect. Wow! My life is so amazing! I wake up in the morning to talk to the Creator of the World! Whoa, I can appreciate even the small things in life—whether eating a candy bar or going to the bathroom! I'm able to think about all the chasadim

Hashem does for me! Whoa, I get to keep Shabbos! Just take a second to think about how avodas Hashem is not only about things we must do. It's such an immense zechus to be owed Hashem besimchah!

And, im yirtzeh Hashem, we all should be zocheh this year to grow and find simcha in our avodas Hashem. And then, im yirtzeh Hashem, it'll really be tichleh shana vekilelosehah and tachel shanah u-virchoseha.

Adapted by CS from Hebrew with some AI help

הגות בפרשיות התורה By **R' Yehuda Nachshoni** (1915 - 1982)

The Meaning of the Curses in Ki Savo

The tochacha in Ki Savo, the long litany of curses at the end of Mishneh Torah, raises an obvious question: the Torah already gave a set of curses in Vayikra, so why repeat them, and what does the second set add? This piece works through how Chazal and the classic commentators answer that question, how they map the curses onto specific moments in Jewish history, and how later teachers found comfort hidden inside them.

Two Sets of Curses

Chazal, in Bava Basra chapter 8, note that the Mishneh Torah curses are fewer than those in Toras Kohanim, forty-nine, against nearly a hundred. R' D.Z. Hoffman questions how that count is reached [needs clarification on the exact calculation]. Despite the shorter list, Chazal in Megillah 31a call the Mishneh Torah curses halachically lighter, for two reasons: they address the individual rather than the community, and Moshe spoke them on his own rather than transmitting them directly from Hashem.

Yet Chazal themselves suggest this halachic leniency masks a harsher reality. The Tanchuma describes Israel's faces turning pale on hearing "one hundred minus one curses," asking who could possibly withstand them, and on investigation, the later curses turned out to strike individuals rather than the whole collective. The Maharsha, in Chiddushei Aggados on Bava Basra, explains why: the first curses were given before the nation entered the land, while individuals bore no mutual responsibility for one another's sins. By the time of the Mishneh Torah curses, the people had entered the land and become guarantors for each other, which makes those curses, despite their technical leniency, the more severe set. The Maharsha also cites the Zohar, which ties the Mishneh Torah curses to the Second Temple era, a view this piece returns to below. Ramban uses the same First/Second Temple distinction to explain why the first curses came "from Hashem" and the second "on his own": in the First Temple, the Shechina was openly revealed, but in the Second Temple only Hashem's glory remained, without that revelation, hence the shift in phrasing.

A further difference is structural. The Toras Kohanim curses arrive in stages, so that repentance at an early stage can prevent what follows. The Mishneh Torah curses, by contrast, are delivered all at once, concluding with מלבד הברית אשר כרת אתם בחורב ("besides the covenant He made with them at Horeb"), which already establishes that punishment scales with the severity of the sin. The commentators devote enormous attention to these curses; this piece follows their central approach of reading the tochacha through specific historical events, and its continuing relevance across Jewish history.

Reading History Into the Text

Abarbanel opens his commentary on the tochacha with a foundational claim: these curses were not exaggeration or threat, but prophecy, spoken "with a holy divine spirit," and fulfilled in full by the generations that sinned. Ramban and Akeidas Yitzchak share this reading. R' D.Z. Hoffman is more cautious about tying prophecy to single events, though he too identifies specific moments, for instance, reading "Hashem will

return you to Egypt in ships" as Titus's deportation of 17,000 Jewish rebels to forced labor in Egypt before the Temple's destruction. Still, the earlier commentators consistently read the curses through this historical lens, a view discussed further in parshas Bechukosai and developed here. Ramban: Two Curses, Two Temples

Ramban and Abarbanel disagree on the deepest question underlying all of this: did the Second Temple era constitute a genuine redemption, warranting curses of its own, or was it merely a pause within one long exile? Ramban holds that the First Temple's exile formally ended in the Second Temple period, not as a complete redemption, since the exiles never fully regathered or repented and remained subject to Persia and Greece, but as a distinct chapter in its own right. On this basis he assigns the Toras Kohanim curses to the First Temple and the Mishneh Torah curses to the Second.

The textual evidence, in his reading: the first curses mention sun-images and idols, absent from the second set because the Second Temple era had no idolatry; the second curses omit the "pleasing aroma," since the heavenly fire had already ceased; and they warn of "a nation from afar whose language you will not understand", Rome, since Israel understood the Chaldean of the first exile (as in "Please speak to your servants in Aramaic, for we understand it"), but not Latin. Other details point the same way: "you will bear sons and daughters but they will not be yours" recalls Titus exiling Jewish youth to Rome (unlike the first exile, which didn't separate young from old), and "Hashem will return you to Egypt in ships" underscores the shame of captives returning to their original taskmaster. The verse "Hashem will lead you and your king" fits either King Agrippa's exile to Rome or Pompey's capture of Aristobulus, and the horrifying accounts of siege-cannibalism match the Second Temple's destruction as well. Ramban leans heavily throughout on the historical record of Josephus (Yosef ben Matisyahu), which clearly shaped his reading.

Abarbanel: One Unbroken Exile

Abarbanel rejects this framework outright: in his view, no real redemption followed the First Temple's fall. The Second Temple period was a passing episode within a single ongoing exile that continues to this day, the exiles never truly regathered, but scattered across the globe and into Europe, never to return. The Second Temple return, he argues, rested only on a license from the Persian king; part of the nation used it to regroup, then rebelled and was expelled again. Even the grandeur of Herod's Temple was freedom wrapped in subjugation to Rome, an improvement, but never true redemption. On this view, both sets of curses describe one continuous exile running from the First Temple to the present. Abarbanel cites Ralbag, who reads "I will lay waste to your sanctuaries" as the destruction of diaspora synagogues and study halls, and "the land of your enemies will consume you" as the expulsions and massacres across France, England, Spain, and elsewhere, noting that the French expulsion alone displaced twice as many Jews as had left Egypt. Abarbanel supports this reading with four proofs that the Mishneh Torah curses cover the First Temple as well: (i) fleeing on "seven roads" fits only the First Temple, Second Temple Jews famously fought rather than fled; (ii) being "exploited and crushed all the days" matches the First Temple's string of grinding exiles, unlike the Second Temple's single sudden expulsion; (iii) "Hashem will return you to Egypt in ships" fits the First Temple, since Second Temple captives were taken to Rome, not Egypt; and (iv) "Hashem will lead you and your king" describes King Zedekiah's exile, confirmed by Chazal in Yoma 52, and the sequencing (exiles, then the king) matches the First Temple, reversed in the Second. He adds that many tochacha verses echo Eichah directly, reinforcing the First Temple connection.

The Three Roman Invasions and Eight Evils

At the same time, Abarbanel finds the later Roman destruction addressed too: "Hashem will bring a nation against you from afar" repeats the word "nation" three times, hinting at three Roman invasions of Judea, Pompey's, in support of Hyrcanus; Sosius's, which captured Jerusalem while Herod fought Antigonus; and Vespasian and Titus's final campaign. This last invasion, he argues, brought eight distinct evils, each tied to a specific verse: (i) famine, "he will eat the fruit of your livestock"; (ii) a prolonged siege, "he will besiege you in all your gates"; (iii) disease from starvation, "Hashem will make your plagues extraordinary," linked to disproportionate fevers, plague, and hemorrhoids among the besieged; (iv) internal rebel infighting, "you will be left few in number"; (v) exile itself, "you will be torn from upon the land"; (vi) forced conversion, "you will serve other gods there," matching the later Anusim; (vii) reversed fortune, "in the morning you will say, if only it were evening..."; and (viii) captives sold in foreign markets, "Hashem will return you to Egypt in ships." Even here, Abarbanel finds a hidden mercy: "there will be no buyer" meant exiled Jews would serve the king directly rather than becoming ordinary slaves. He and Ramban broadly agree on the details, but differ on scope, Abarbanel applies the final tochacha to both destructions, while Ramban limits it to the Second Temple alone, reflecting their deeper disagreement over how to evaluate the Second Temple era itself. Akeidas Yitzchak extends Abarbanel's approach further. He reads "diseases of Egypt" as the rebels' stubbornness, just as Egypt hardened its heart despite the plagues, lawless factions refused Titus's offer of peace and continued serving Hashem under Roman rule, and so brought on the destruction [unclear whether this refers to the Temple specifically or the Jewish presence generally]. He also reads "you will serve other gods there" as pointing to Spain's Anusim, forced into an entirely foreign faith, unlike the first exile, where Israel at least knew the Chaldean religion. He carries this historical method through the whole tochacha.

The Blessing Hidden in the Curse

Chassidic teachers, following a long line of earlier voices, read comfort into these curses rather than only dread. The simplest method: naming the cause. If a curse is the natural consequence of sin, as in "and because of our sins we were exiled from our land," then repentance can undo it, much as a doctor's warning about certain foods isn't a curse but a diagnosis, and a diagnosis is the first step toward a cure. The Torah makes this explicit mid-tochacha, conditioning the entire curse on failing "to observe and do all the words of this Torah written in this book." A second, subtler comfort is buried in "and among those nations you will not be tranquil, and there will be no rest." Resh Lakish, in Bereishis Rabbah 33, compares Israel to a dove that would never have returned had she found a resting place elsewhere, this restlessness is precisely what has kept the Jewish people from dissolving into the nations around them. Akeidas Yitzchak, writing as the Spanish Inquisition's smoke rose, took the same verse to mean that no amount of Jewish success among the nations would ever bring real peace, they would always be shamed, despised, and schemed against. Ibn Ezra makes a parallel point on "you will serve other gods there and become an astonishment": converting offers no escape, since the astonishment follows regardless. Harsh as it is, this curse turns out to be what preserved the nation, without it, assimilation might have finished what persecution could not.

Conclusion

Read together, these threads trace a single argument: the tochacha in Ki Savo is not a rhetorical flourish but a precise, historically fulfilled prophecy, and the debate over which destruction it describes, the First Temple, the Second, or both in one continuous exile, is really a debate about how to understand Jewish history itself, whether it has known a true redemption since Sinai's covenant was broken, or only a series of

reprieves within one long story. Either way, the commentators agree the curses were never meant only as terror. Built into their language is both the diagnosis that makes repentance possible and the "restlessness" that has kept the nation intact through every exile it describes, turning even the tochacha's bleakest verses into a source of enduring, historically vindicated hope.

from: YUTorah <yutorah@comms.yu.edu>

date: Aug 27, 2026, 5:37 PM

The Prophecy Being Fulfilled in Our Time Rabbi Dr. Kenneth Brander

The sixth of the seven haftarot of consolation, taken from Isaiah 60, reads almost like a dispatch from the present. Verse after verse, the prophet's words describe a reality that anyone living in the modern State of Israel can feel, see, and touch - or, at times, recognize as one that we are still struggling to fully realize. For the modern Jew, reading this haftarah today is not an act of longing; it is an act of recognition.

The opening verse sets the tone: "Rise, give light, for your light has come; the glory of the Lord shines over you" (Isaiah 60:1). The very next verse acknowledges the darkness from which that light emerged: "Darkness may cover the earth, and clouds shroud nations" (v. 2). Those words carry enormous weight when read in the shadow of the Holocaust. In the immediate aftermath of the Shoah, the Jewish people were a nation of survivors. There was no rational basis to believe in Jewish continuity, let alone the reestablishment of a sovereign state. And yet, through what can only be described as a momentous unfolding of divine providence, something extraordinary occurred. "Nations will walk toward your light, and kings into the brilliance you shine forth" (v. 3).

To a remarkable degree, nations have indeed walked by our light. The embassies that dot the landscape of Israel, representing governments from across the globe, reflect a renewed Jewish presence among the family of nations, a testament to the emerging radiance of the Jewish people that draws others toward connection and engagement. Verse 4 speaks of the ingathering of exiles from the far reaches of the earth: "Raise your eyes; look around and see: all of them gathered in and come to you; your sons have come from far away." Walk the streets of Jerusalem or Tel Aviv today and you encounter people of Ethiopian, Russian, Moroccan, American, French, and European descent, a living mosaic of the Diaspora finding its way home. This is not metaphor; this is the transformation of history into lived reality. It is a reality we are privileged to witness; we have only to raise our eyes and look. Isaiah then describes the wealth of nations flowing toward Zion: "The ocean's abundance will turn to you; the wealth of nations will come to you" (v. 5). The sustained flow of capital investment into Israel from America, Europe, and Asia, across technology, infrastructure, medicine, and industry, echoes this vision. And the following verses deepen the picture. "The children of strangers will build your walls; their kings will be in your service" (v. 10). International capital and global partnerships have indeed played a significant role in the rebuilding and development of the Jewish state. "Your gates will be always open, day and night, never closed, as the wealth of nations is brought into you, their kings led to you" (v. 11). Israel's cities today are vibrant, dynamic, and deeply connected to the wider world.

Even in the realm of geopolitics, the text resonates powerfully. “For the nations and kingdoms that do not serve you will be lost, nations desolate, destroyed” (v. 12). One does not need to stretch the imagination far to see this playing out. The Abraham Accords, not coincidentally, were signed by the wealthiest and most successful Arab and Muslim countries. Meanwhile, those who have made Israel’s destruction their defining mission continue to experience precisely what the verse describes, decline, deterioration, desolation. Verse 16 captures a transformation nearly unimaginable in Jewish history: that Israel would stand as an equal among nations, engaging with world leaders as a sovereign power. For centuries, Jews lived at the mercy of rulers who could expel or oppress them at will. Today, representatives of the Jewish state meet presidents, prime ministers, and monarchs as equals, an expression of restored dignity and agency.

And yet the haftarah does not allow for complacency or triumphalism. It also presents a moral and spiritual challenge. “No more will violence be heard of in your land, nor plunder or destruction in your borders” (v. 18). This is not yet our reality. Violence remains part of our lived experience, between Jew and Jew, between Jews and others, between Israel and those who wish to destroy it.

The persecution of minorities who cannot help themselves has no place in a state that reflects not only strength, but also compassion, responsibility, and moral clarity. A society rooted in Torah must aspire to protect the vulnerable, uphold human dignity, and be a true light unto nations.

At the same time, something remarkable is unfolding. In a world searching for meaning and connection, Israel consistently ranks among the happiest countries on earth. Beneath the external pressures and challenges lies a deep sense of purpose, and a connection to something larger than themselves, history, heritage, destiny, and collective responsibility. This sense of shared meaning is part of what sustains Israeli society and empowers resilience.

We are not yet at the end of the journey. But we have come far enough to recognize that we are living within a process that our prophets described. The vision is no longer distant, it is unfolding before our eyes, and it calls on us to help shape what comes next. We therefore conclude with the haftarah’s final verse, as both a prayer and a commitment: “In its time, I will do this swiftly” (v. 22). May we merit to play our part in bringing the vision of our haftarah closer to fulfillment

Adapted by CS (with AI help) from

לתורה ולמועדים By **Rav Shlomo Yosef Zevin** (1888 to 1978)

Ki Savo

א *the Kohen shall take the basket from your hand.* From here, *Chazal* say in several places concerning the words in *Parshas Re’eh* *the offering of your hand* that *this refers to bikkurim*. A person’s hands are different from all his other limbs. Every other limb has its fixed place, but a person can lower his hands even beneath his feet, or raise them above his head. The same is true in the moral and spiritual sense. With his hands a person can perpetrate the most monstrous acts in the world, *the hands are the hands of Esav*. Murder, theft, robbery and every similar crime can all be committed with the hands. *ידים דמים* *your hands are filled with blood*. The hands are constantly active, and they touch even places of *tumah*. At *Neilah* we sum up the *avodah* of the day

with the plea *so that we may cease the wrongdoing of our hands*.

But a person can also raise his hands above his head, as the *pasuk* says *שאו ידכם קודש* *raise your hands in holiness*. The hands of the *Kohen Gadol* were holy, *Aharon raised his hands toward the people and blessed them*. Regarding the true and righteous *Neviim* we say *על ידי עבדיך הנביאים כתוב לאמר through Your servants the Neviim it is written*. Their hands, *כביכול*, were so pure that it could be said that the Divine word was transmitted through their very hands. When a person performs good deeds with his hands, whether *bein adam laMakom* or *bein adam lachaveiro*, he elevates those hands, raises them and sanctifies them.

This is the inner meaning of *netilas yadayim*. The *sefarim* explain that *נטילה* itself expresses elevation, as in *וניתלם וינשאם* *He lifted them and carried them*. A person washes his hands in the moral sense, making his hands clean, and thereby lifts and elevates them. But every spiritual idea must ultimately take tangible form in a practical *mitzvah*. The abstract idea therefore becomes embodied in the actual *mitzvah* of *netilas yadayim*, literally washing and raising the hands.

A person’s handiwork begins with the property he acquires through the labor of his hands. In earlier times, the principal form of wealth was the produce of the land. The first fruits of that produce must therefore be sanctified as *bikkurim*. The beginning influences everything that follows. When the first is holy, the remainder becomes sanctified with it. *קדש לי כל בכור* *sanctify to Me every firstborn*, which *Chazal* understand as teaching that every beginning must be sanctified. Thus *ותרומת ידך* *the offering of your hand* refers to *bikkurim*. When a person sanctifies the first fruits of his labor, the beginning of the work of his hands, he elevates his hands themselves, fulfilling in a deeper sense *שאו ידכם קודש* *raise your hands in holiness*.

ב *all these blessings will come upon you and reach you*. The wording implies that it is not sufficient for the *berachos* merely to come. There is an additional need for the *berachos* *that they actually reach you*.

There is a distinction between the *din* and judgment of *Rosh Hashanah* and the judgment that takes place each day. Although *בראש השנה יכתובו וביום צום* *on Rosh Hashanah they are inscribed and on Yom Kippur they are sealed*, and a person’s sustenance is allotted to him on *Rosh Hashanah*, we nevertheless *daven* every day *רפאנו* *heal us* and *ברך עלינו את השנה* *bless this year for us*, together with all our other daily requests. The *sefarim* explain that on *Rosh Hashanah* the judgment is general. A particular person may be decreed an abundance of goodness in an overall sense, yet that goodness may remain in the spiritual worlds above. In order for that *hashpaah* to descend into this world and become expressed in the material blessings of *parnassah* and the other needs of everyday life, a separate *din* and judgment is required each day.

This is reflected in the *pasuk* *דברו* *He sends His word to the earth, His word runs swiftly*. There are two forms of *hashpaah*. One is the *שולח*, reminiscent of *מי השלח ההולכים לאט* *the waters of Shiloach that flow gently*, where the flow descends slowly. But there is another form, *עד מהרה* *swiftly*, where the *hashpaah* descends rapidly to its destination.

This is therefore the meaning of *בברכות האלה* *all these berachos will come upon you* and also *והשיגוך* *they will actually reach you below*, in the sense of *דברו* *His word runs swiftly*. The *berachos* will not remain in the upper worlds alone.

There is another interpretation of the *השיגוך*. One of the collections of Chassidic stories relates that a great *chassid* once entered the Kotzker Rebbe and asked him what the words *בברכות האלה* *the words* meant. The Rebbe answered simply *והשיגוך* *this is like הרמב"ם על* *the Raavad’s hasagos on the Rambam*. The *chassid* left the room filled with tremendous excitement and inspiration. The story records no explanation of what the Kotzker meant.

Perhaps it may be understood as follows. *Chazal* say *על מעבירה את האדם* *poverty can cause a person to lose his own judgment and even his awareness of his Creator*. The *Navi* similarly says *ויהי כי ירעב*

והתקצר וקלל *when he becomes hungry he will become enraged and curse.* Klal Yisrael themselves *did not listen to Moshe because of their crushed spirit and hard labor.* Poverty and distress can therefore provide a person with a certain excuse for his failures. But when Heaven gives a person *berachah* and *yeshuah*, he no longer has the excuse of poverty and a crushed spirit. There is now a great *hasagah* against him. In the language of the Raavad's *hasagos*, it is a challenge or objection directed at the person. Why has he not become better. Why has he not risen to a higher spiritual level. This is *והשיגור*. The *berachos* themselves create a *hasagah* against him.

Yet the idea must be understood more deeply. If there is a *hasagah*, an objection, then an answer can be given to that objection. The person can genuinely become better and rise to a higher level. He can respond *מה אשיב לה' כל תגמוליו עלי כוס ישועות אשא ובשם ה' אקרא how can I repay Hashem for all His kindness to me, I will raise the cup of salvation and call in the Name of Hashem.* Having responded properly to the first *berachah*, he is then worthy of receiving a new *berachah*.

And that new *berachah* is itself without limit *די בלי די I will pour out blessing for you without limit.* Above there are *berachos* without end. But according to the measure of each new *berachah*, there comes a new *hasagah* as well, because there is likewise no limit to spiritual ascent. *גבוה מעל גבוה שומר וגבוהים עליהם there is one higher than the high, and still higher ones above them.* Even of *Moshe Rabbeinu* it is said *מטע ותחסרהו מעט You made him only slightly lower than the Divine*, and a person must always say *מתי יגיעו מעשי למעשי אבותי when will my deeds reach the deeds of my forefathers.*

The process therefore continues without end. *Berachah* produces a new *hasagah*, that *hasagah* brings a person to a higher level, and his new level makes him worthy of another *berachah*. Then that new *berachah* creates yet another *hasagah*. This is *והשיגור* *all these berachos will come upon you and reach you*, always *berachos* and *hasagos*, *hasagos* and *berachos*.

From: Rav Frand - <ryfrand@torah.org>

Date: August 26, 2026

Here We Are Allowed to Claim Our Reward By Rabbi Yissocher Frand

These divrei Torah were adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Series on the weekly portion: #1480 – Someone Dropped the Sefer Torah in Shul – Does Everyone Have to Fast? Good Shabbos.

Parshas Ki Savo contains "Vidui Ma'sros," which is a ceremony at the end of the third year of the three-year cycle of ma'aser (tithes), whereby a person makes a declaration that he kept all the halachos of ma'aser. "I gave the Levi his ten percent and I gave to the ger (convert), yosam (orphan), and almana (widow) their portion, etc." The declaration continues proclaiming having kept all the laws associated with ma'aser.

Finally, the declaration includes a tefilla (prayer): Ribono shel Olam, "Hashkeefa m'm'eon kodshecha" (Look down from Your heavenly abode) and bless Your nation Israel and the land you gave us, as you have promised to our fathers, a land flowing with milk and honey." This seems to be an innocent pasuk. We say to the Ribono shel Olam, "Listen, I kept the mitzvos, please reward me appropriately. Look down from Your heavenly abode and bless me, etc."

Rashi, however, says something a little strange over here: Rashi says that the statement "Hashkeefa m'm'eon kodshecha" is not a plea, but rather it is a demand: We have done what You commanded us to do, now it is Your turn to do what You promised to do for us.

Can you imagine coming to your boss after you've completed an

assignment and saying to him, "Listen, I did mine, now you do yours?" That is not the way you talk to a superior. It is certainly not the way you talk to the Ribono shel Olam!

The Chasam Sofer strengthens this question: The Ribono shel Olam does not like when a person advances a claim for what he believes is coming to him. Where do we see that? The pasuk says in Sefer Nechemia, "Zachra li Elokai l'tova kol asher aseesi al ha'am hazeh" (Nechemia 5:19). Nechemia says to the Ribono shel Olam, "I have taken care of Your people, now I want to get honorable mention." What was the honorable mention that Nechemia was referring to? The Gemara (Sanhedrin 93) says that most of what we call Sefer Ezra really contains the words of Nechemia. It really should be called Sefer Nechemia. Why is it not called by his name? The Gemara says that it is a punishment because Nechemia tried to take credit for his actions. He felt he deserved honor for carrying out his Divine mission, and said as much. The Gemara says that it is not appropriate to make such a request of Hashem. It was his duty to carry out the mission for which he was put on the earth. He should not expect credit for performing that duty.

And yet here, by Vidui Ma'asros, we do say "We have done that which you have commanded us, now give us the bracha (blessing) we have coming..." How do we reconcile this? We know from Nechemia that this is unacceptable behavior, and yet this is exactly what we do in the Vidui Ma'aser proclamation!

The answer may be derived from an interesting Rashi in Parsha Re'eh. The pasuk says "And you shall rejoice before Hashem your G-d – you, your son, your daughter, your slave, your maidservant, the Levi who is in your gates, the ger, the yosam, and the almana who are among you..." (Devarim 16:11). When we come to Yerushalayim, we are commanded to be happy together with our family members and our servants and the Levites who are in our midst...and the Levi, the ger, the yosam, and the almana.

Rashi writes on the words "the Levi and the ger and the yosam and the almana" – "My four corresponding to your four!" I have four groups of people that I want you to worry about. They are the Levi, the ger, the yosam, and the almana. You take care of Mine and I will take care of yours!

The previous Rashi emphasizes: "I have rejoiced and I have caused others to rejoice." When I make others happy and I give to the Levi, the ger, the yosam, and the almana (the four people the Ribono shel Olam Himself worries about) the Ribono shel Olam will make my family happy as well. This is an exception to the rule. This is a place where a person has a right to advance a claim towards Heaven. Normally, the expression "hashkeefa" has negative connotations. It is different here because the person has given tzedaka. Tzedaka greases the wheels, so to speak. Here it is legitimate to ask for a quid pro quo. The Ribono shel Olam has promised it: You take care of Mine and I will take care of yours.

Answer the Prayer of the Righteous and Answer the Prayer of the Masses

I would like to share a ha'ara from the Netziv, not from his He'emak Davar but from his Har'chev Davar. The Netziv elaborates on his commentary to Tehillim 102. "Ata sakum terachem Tzion ki es l'chanena ki va moed." (Tehillim 102:14). These are famous pesukim because they had the zechus (merit) of becoming a song. Any pasuk that is zoche to become a song is well known. The translation is "You shall arise and have mercy on Tzion (Eretz Yisrael), for it is the

time to give it favor, the time has come.” The next pasuk continues, “For Your servants have cherished her stones and favored her dust.” These pesukim are followed by an expression “Paneh el tefilas ha’arar” (Turn to the prayer of the arar) (ibid. 102:18), which is difficult to translate. What is the “arar?” ArtScroll translates it as “the devastated one.” Then the pasuk continues “and don’t discard their tefillos.” The Netziv asks a grammatical question: Why does the pasuk switch from singular to plural? Then the pasuk continues: “You listen to the cries of the imprisoned one, to liberate those doomed to die.” Once again, why does the pasuk switch between singular and plural?

The Netziv says something that is especially meaningful before Rosh Hashanna. Dovid Hamelech saw b’nevua (prophetically) that there would come a time in the “Final Generation” that we will be in a galus of persecution and we will say “And grant Your fear upon all Your creatures...Reveal Your honor upon us” (from the Rosh Hashanna amidah).

However, the intention of this tefilla is not the same for all people. There are some people who love G-d with all their heart and daven (pray) that His honor should be magnified. Such people are sincerely bothered by the fact that the Shechina (Divine Presence) is in galus and is not properly recognized. Those people sincerely daven that the Shechina should return to Eretz Yisrael. However, there are others who have no sense of feeling galus. They don’t care about the fact that the Shechina is in galus. They recite these words without emotion, by rote.

This is what Dovid Hamelech is saying: Ribono shel Olam, there are going to be thousands and thousands and millions and millions of Jews who are going to daven that you should reveal your Shechina without really meaning it. All they really want on Rosh Hashanna is “parnassa” (financial livelihood). They ask for wealth, for a shidduch, or for a refuah for a sick family member. Yet, they just mouth the words “Speedily reveal the honor of Your kingdom upon us.”

The Netziv says that Dovid Hamelech foresaw this scenario. Therefore, He said, “Ribono shel Olam, turn to the tefilla of the arar.” Listen to the tefillos of those devastated ones who really mean what they say and really want the giluy (revelation of the) Shechina. However, at the same time, do not discard the tefillos of the regular people either.

There is a famous story of a Rebbe who got up after davening and gave a brachato the people. But he forgot to include the word “parnassa” in his bracha. Everyone in the audience yelled out “parnassa!” and the Rebbe said, “Oh yeah, and parnassa!” While it is true that many people are primarily interested in themselves, nevertheless there are people who really care about the honor of the Shechina. Dovid Hamelech is requesting that the tefillos of the masses should be included with the tefillos of the righteous. Just like You answer the tefillos of the righteous, so too, please answer the tefillos of the masses.

Transcribed by David Twersky; Jerusalem DavidATwersky@gmail.com Technical Assistance by Dovid Hoffman; Baltimore, MD dhoffman@torah.org This week’s write-up is adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissochar Frand’s Commuter Chavrusah Series on the weekly Torah portion. A listing of the halachic portions for Parshas Ki Savo is provided below: #066 – Learning Hebrew: Mitzvah or Not? #251 – Shidduchim and Parental Wishes #604 – Reading the Tochacha #648 – The Onain and Kaddish #912 – Shaimos What I Do With All Those Papers? #1130 – The Silent Shmoneh Esrei – Must It Be Silent #1172 – Can One Remove His Mezzuzos When Moving To A New Home? #1216 – Are Women Obligated in Yishuv Eretz Yisroel?

#1392 – Wearing Tephillin on a Toupee or a Cast #1480 – Someone Dropped the Sefer Torah in Shul – Does Everyone Have to Fast? #1605 – Should You Stand When the Chasan and Kallah Walk to the Chupah? A complete catalogue can be ordered from the Yad Yechiel Institute, PO Box 511, Owings Mills MD 21117-0511. Call (410) 358-0416 or e-mail tapes@yadyechiel.org or visit <http://www.yadyechiel.org/> for further information.

Adapted from

When G-d Wants You to Compliment Yourself Before I Confess My Sins, I Must Confess My Greatness By: Rabbi YY Jacobson

Do I Have to Tell Him?

An old German man was feeling guilty about something he had done, so he decided to go to Confession.

He said, "Bless me, Father, for I have sinned. I feel terrible because during World War II, I hid a Jew in my attic."

The priest said, "But that's not a sin! I wouldn't feel bad about that if I were you."

"But I made him agree to pay me 50 Marks for every week he stayed."

The priest said, "Well, I admit it wasn't the noblest thing to do, charging the man to save his life, but you did save his life, after all, and that is a good thing. Don't worry too much; G-d forgives."

The man said, "Oh, thank you, Father, that eases my mind. I have only one more question to ask you: Do I have to tell him the war is over?"

Make a Confession!

I want to bring back confession to Judaism. People attribute confession to Catholicism, as though it's the job of priests. I believe it's time to reclaim it. So I'm going to ask each of my readers to make at least one confession today.

Before you dismiss my plea, let me explain.

Tithing Cycle

This week's Torah portion, Ki Savo, discusses a law known as "Vidui Maaser," the Tithing Confession.

In the Holy Land, tithes were taken from one's crops on a set three-year cycle. Each year, about 2 percent of the produce (terumah) went to the Kohanim, who had no income of their own due to their Temple service. Another 10 percent (maaser rishon) went to the Levites, who likewise served in the Temple and taught. Other tithes varied by year: Year 1, beyond terumah and maaser rishon, a portion (maaser sheni) was taken to Jerusalem and eaten there, giving Jews a chance to spend time in the Holy City and learn from its masters.

Year 2, same as year one. Year 3, instead of maaser sheni, a portion (maaser ani) went to the poor. Years 4–5, same as years 1–2.

Year 6, same as year 3. Year 7, the sabbatical year, shemittah: no plowing, planting, or tithing. The field lay open to all.

On the eve of Passover in years four and seven, every owner had to confirm that all tithes from the past three years had reached their proper destination. Then, on the last day of that Passover, the farmer recited this declaration:

כי תכלה לעשר את-כל-מעשר תבואתך, בשנה השלישית—שנת המעשר: ונתתה ללוי, לגר ליתום ולאִלמנה, ואכלו בשעריך, ושבעו. ואמרת לפני ה' אלקך בערתי הקדש מן-הבית, וגם נתתיו ללוי ולגר ליתום ולאִלמנה, ככל-מצותך, אשר צויתני: לא-עברתי ממצותיך, ולא שכחתי. לא-אכלתי באני ממנו, ולא-בערתי ממנו בטמא, ולא-נתתי ממנו, למת; שמעתי, בקול ה' אלקי--עשיתי, ככל אשר צויתני. השקיפה ממעון קדשך מן-השמים, וברך את-עמך את-ישראל, ואת האדמה, אשר נתתה לנו--כאשר נשבעת לאבותינו, ארץ זבת חלב ודבש [1]

"You shall say before G-d your Lord: I have removed all the sacred portions from my house. I have given the appropriate portions to the

Levite, to the convert, to the orphan, and to the widow, following all the commandments You prescribed to us. I have not violated Your commandments, and have not forgotten anything... I have listened to the voice of the Lord my G-d; I have done everything You commanded me..."

G-d wants us to declare, in effect: I did it, and I did it well! But why? He knows we did it. We know we did it. What's the point of an official verbal declaration? There's no other precedent in Judaism for literally complimenting ourselves before the Almighty.

This Is a Confession?

Stranger still, this recitation is called, in Talmudic literature, Vidui Maaser, the Tithing *Confession*. Yet it's the furthest thing from one. A vidui, in its classic sense, means admitting guilt and asking forgiveness. Our confessional prayers (mostly recited on Yom Kippur) all share the message: Ashamnu, bagadnu, gazalnu, debarnu dofi... "We are guilty; we have dealt treacherously; we have stolen; we have spoken falsely..." We confess our sins, express remorse, and resolve to change.

Here we have the opposite. Imagine approaching your wife and saying, "My dear, I want to make a confession." Her ears perk up. You continue:

"I confess that I am a wonderful, accomplished, flawless, magnificent, sensitive, kind, caring, handsome, and passionate husband and father. I have fulfilled all my duties; I have been loyal to you with every fiber of my being; I forgot nothing, I did not transgress. Alas, I am the perfect man."

Call this guy what you like, it is not a confession!

Yet that's exactly what we do with the tithe confession: "I have removed all the sacred portions from my house... I have not violated Your commandments, and have not forgotten anything... I have done everything You commanded me." [2]

And Judaism calls this a vidui! [3]

If more Jews knew this counted as "confession," the synagogue would have long lines every day, Jews declaring how perfect, impeccable, and faultless they are.

A Catholic boy told his Jewish friend, "My priest knows more than your rabbi." The Jewish boy replied, "Of course he does, you tell him everything."

Poor Christians. They think confession means airing your negatives. Nonsense, confession means saying how perfect you are.

I'm Awesome

This mitzvah teaches an incredible truth: it's important to verbalize, from time to time, how good, beautiful, and capable you are, not generically or haughtily, but specifically and honestly. There's always some area of your life where you're a success story, and you need to see it and say it. Here, the Jew declares that as far as tithing goes, he did a magnificent job.

Why call this "confession"? The Sages, 1800 years before modern psychology, taught this truth: only when I believe I am good am I capable of regretting my mistakes. If I believe I'm just a dirty rat, I can't really regret my wrongdoing, I see it as inevitable. Only by appreciating my potential for greatness can I hold myself accountable for my errors.

Genuine confession requires not only confronting a mistake, but believing that you are essentially good, and in some areas, exceptionally good.

Stains on a garment already riddled with them go unnoticed. But spill

something on a fresh, beautiful suit, and you'll take note immediately. If I consider my soul dirty and filthy, my inappropriate behaviors and toxic thoughts just fit right in. Only by appreciating my innate dignity and purity can I begin to notice, and feel bad about, what tarnishes such a beautiful life.

Picture a couple arguing:

She: Darling, you're making a mistake again.

He: Of course, I'm always wrong, you're always right. I'm the dumb, stupid, bad husband, always dead wrong. You're the perfect wife, never wrong.

No woman is pleased by that, because it's meaningless and cynical. "I am always wrong" really means "I am never wrong, you're impossible to please." "You are always right" really means "you are never right."

Sincere confession means: I am sometimes right, but now I am wrong. Not always wrong, wrong now.

The Song of Songs says, "I am dark and beautiful." [4] Both sides matter for growth: I may have succumbed to darkness, but I am inherently beautiful. Hence: 1) I regret what I did, because it doesn't befit the better person I am. [5] 2) I acknowledge I had the power not to do it, it wasn't inevitable, and I regret my choice. 3) I know I have the power to fix it going forward. I am not a victim. [6]

To truly confess, I must first be able to tell G-d: I am good, I am great, I have done what You wanted. And because I'm capable of doing things right, I can sincerely regret it when I don't. The tithing declaration is called confession because it gives meaning to all our other confessions.

My Boy, You're Great

This truth is vital for education, at home and in the classroom.

Your child comes home with a report card; in some subjects he or she did great, in others he or she performed poorly. We instinctively focus on the negative, on what's missing, and try to fix it.

There's a more effective approach: focus on your child's success and strengths. When you see what he's lacking, don't say, "I see you need help with this subject, why are you failing?" Instead say: "I see you're excelling in reading, science, and math, and you got an A-plus for organization and cooperation. It's obvious that when you put your mind to something, you're immensely successful. Now how can we apply these lessons elsewhere?"

If your child is lacking in some behavior at home, point out what he does right instead: "I noticed how well-mannered you were at the table, how considerate you were with your brother, how sensitive you were with your baby sister, that shows how much kindness you have in your heart."

What have you accomplished? You've made your child feel like a success story, without empty flattery ("you're an angel, a tzaddik, the best kid in the world", a lie your child will see through), but with something specific and true.

You've shown him what's great about his life. Now he has a standard for himself: 1) to see why his past behavior fell short, and 2) to believe he's truly capable of better. [7]

Singing My Sins?

The Baal Shem Tov once visited a town in which the people complained that their cantor behaved strangely: on Yom Kippur, he would chant the Al Chet, confession of sins, in a merry melody rather than a somber one. When questioned by the Baal Shem Tov, the cantor explained:

"Rebbe, a king has many servants who serve him. Some prepare the royal meals, others serve the food, others place the crown on the king's head, and yet others run the affairs of the country. Each of them rejoices in his work and the privilege of being so close to the king.

"Now the palace also has a janitor, charged with removing the rubbish and filth from the palace. He looks at and deals with filth all day, approaching it, gathering it, and removing it. Do you think he should be depressed because he's looking at dirt all day? No, he's happy, because he too is serving the king. He's removing the dirt from the king's palace, ensuring that it's beautiful. It's not the dirt he's focused on; it's the King's palace and its beauty that occupies him.

"When a Jew sins, he amasses some dirt on his soul. When he confesses, it isn't the sins, the guilt, the darkness, and the negativity that he's focused on, it's the holiness and beauty of his soul. He's removing the layers of dirt eclipsing it, allowing his inner light to shine in full glory. Is that not a reason to sing and rejoice?"

The Baal Shem Tov was deeply moved, since this captures his essential teaching: while much of Jewish ethics dwells on sin and its consequences, Chassidus focuses primarily on the infinite holiness within every soul.

"Just as you can never estimate the treasures hidden beneath the earth's crust, so you can never estimate the treasures hidden beneath a Jew's," the Baal Shem Tov said.

This was central to the Baal Shem Tov (1698–1760), whose birthday we mark on the 18th of Elul. (That date is also the birthday of Rabbi Schneur Zalman of Liadi, the Alter Rebbe, founder of Chabad (1745–1812), and the yahrtzeit of the Maharal of Prague, 1609, the Alter Rebbe's great-great-grandfather.)

When you meet a fellow Jew with blemishes and mistakes, including yourself, don't tell him how bad he is. Tell him how good he is, how good he can be, and how much G-d loves and needs him. Then he'll want, on his own, to clear the clouds blocking his inner light. To this day, in most communities, the confession is sung to a melody, "Ashamnu, Bagadnu... Veal Kulam Eloka Selichos...", inspired by our tithe confession.

An Exercise

I return to my plea: make one confession today. Tell someone, your rabbi, your friend, your spouse, one positive, specific thing about yourself that you're proud of, not arrogantly, but as a genuine "confession." Because once you realize how good and capable you are, you might just ask: why am I not living up to my potential?[8]

[1] Deuteronomy 26:12–15 [2] Deuteronomy 26:13–14 [3] The Sforno (Rabbi Ovadya Sforno, 1470–1550) explains that the ceremony is called "vidui" because an implicit tragedy hovers over it. Before the Golden Calf, Divine service belonged to the firstborn of each family; after the sin, it passed to the tribe of Levi. Had we not sinned, tithes could have stayed within the family. Now our homes can no longer hold that holiness, so we must remove it and confess. This fits the Sforno's view elsewhere that, absent the Golden Calf, every home would itself have been a Temple. The prayer's word "Hashkifa" [look down], elsewhere used for a negative gaze (Genesis 19:28, Exodus 14:24), likewise alludes to the sin we're confessing. [4] Song of Songs 1:5. Cf. Likkutei Torah, Shir HaShirim, on this verse. [5] See Sichas 18 Elul 5712 (1952). [6] See Likkutei Sichos, vol. 30, Miketz. [7] Rabbi Dr. Abraham Twerski relates a related story about his grandfather, the Alter Rebbe, "The Rusty Penny." [8] Based on a sermon by Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik ("Bris Avos," in "Chamash Derashos"); the second half draws on an address from the Lubavitcher Rebbe, Shabbos Parshas Acharei 5748 (1988).

Adapted from *on the parsha - Parshas Ki Savo* (this piece edited by דניאל ונטורה <https://www.yeshiva.org.il/wiki/index.php/תבואה>)

Parshas Ki Savo is the seventh parsha in Sefer Devarim. Its name comes from its opening verse: והיה כי תבוא אל הארץ אשר ה' אלקיך נתן לך נחלה וירשתה "And it shall be, when you enter the land that Hashem your G-d gives you as an inheritance, and you possess it and dwell in it" (Ki Savo 26:1). The haftarah is the sixth of the Shivah D'Nechemta, the seven haftaros of consolation, and begins וקום אורי כי בא אורך וכבוד ה' עליך זרה "Arise, shine, for your light has come, and the glory of Hashem has shone upon you" (Yeshayahu 60:1).

In this parsha, Moshe Rabbeinu is nearing the end of his enumeration of the 613 mitzvos. Only two positive mitzvos remain to be stated, in Parshas Vayeilech: the mitzvah of Hakhel, following the Shemittah year, and the mitzvah that every Jew write a Sefer Torah for himself.

יולך ה' אתך ואת מלכך אשר תקים עליך אל גוי אשר לא ידעת "Hashem will lead you and the king whom you will appoint over you to a nation that neither you nor your fathers knew, and there you will serve other gods, of wood and stone" (Ki Savo 28:36), the Ramban presents a chapter in Jewish history describing the circumstances that brought about the destruction of the Second Beis HaMikdash.

He begins with Aristobulus, a king of the Hasmonean dynasty, whom a Roman commander brought to Rome in chains. The result was that והיו למשל ולשנייה בכל העמים, שהיו תמהים על גבורתם אשר מעולם, איך נפלו גבורים ויאבדו כלי מלחמה "they became a proverb and a byword among all the nations, who marveled at their former might and asked how the mighty had fallen and the weapons of war had been lost." He continues with King Agrippa, who came with an emissary of the Roman king and conquered the land, and concludes with Vespasian, who conquered the cities of Yehudah, and his successor, the wicked Titus, who destroyed the Beis HaMikdash. Then the verse was fulfilled: והפיצך ה' בכל העמים מקצה הארץ ועד קצה הארץ, ועבדת שם אלהים אחרים "Hashem will scatter you among all the peoples, from one end of the earth to the other, and there you will serve other gods unknown to you and your fathers, of wood and stone" (Ki Savo 28:64). This warning by Moshe Rabbeinu was fulfilled entirely, in its plain and literal meaning, as the Torah later states: הנך שכב עם אבותיך, אשר לא ידעת אתה ואבותיך, עץ ואבן וקם העם הזה וזנה אחר אלהי נכר הארץ אשר הוא בא שמה בקרבך, ועזבני והפר את בריתי אשר כרתו אתו "Hashem said to Moshe: Behold, you are about to lie with your fathers, and this people will rise and stray after the foreign gods of the land into whose midst it is coming, and it will forsake Me and break My covenant that I made with it" (Vayeilech 31:16).

The Contents of the Parsha

The parsha opens with the mitzvah of bringing bikkurim, the first-ripened fruits of the trees and produce of the field, in a basket to the Beis HaMikdash, as it says: ראשית בכורי אדמתך תביא בית ה' אלקיך "The first fruits of your land you shall bring to the House of Hashem your G-d" (Mishpatim 23:19). Each Jew brings the first fruits to the Beis HaMikdash and recites the declaration praising Hakadosh Baruch Hu. It begins ארמי אבד אבי וירד מצרימה "An Aramean sought to destroy my father, and he descended to Egypt" (Ki Savo 26:5), the passage we expound in the Haggadah on Pesach. Bnei Yisrael are commanded to separate terumos u'maasros. In the third and sixth years of the Shemittah cycle, maaser ani is given to the poor, including the stranger, orphan, and widow, and the declaration of vidui maasros accompanies the completion of the tithing cycle. Maaser rishon is given to the Levi in the first through sixth years, while maaser ani replaces maaser sheni in the third and sixth years. (See Ki Savo 26:12 and Mishneh Torah, Hilchos Matnos Aniyim 6:4.)

Moshe Rabbeinu then gives a concise summation of the mitzvah sections before the covenant is made: היום הזה ה' אלקיך מצוך לעשות את החקים האלה ואת המשפטים, ושמרת ועשית אותם בכל לבבך ובכל נפשך. את ה' האמרת היום להיות לך לאלקים, וללכת בדרכיו ולשמר חקיו ומצותיו ומשפטיו ולשמע בקלו. וה' האמירך היום להיות לו לעם סגלה כאשר דבר לך, ולשמר כל מצותיו, ולתתך עליון על כל הגוים אשר עשה, לתהלה ולשם ולתפארת, ולהיתך עם קדש לה' אלקיך כאשר דבר "This day Hashem your G-d commands you to perform these statutes and laws, and you shall observe and perform them with all your heart and all your soul. You have

distinguished Hashem today to be your G-d, to walk in His ways and observe His statutes, mitzvos, and laws, and to listen to His voice. And Hashem has distinguished you today to be His treasured people, as He promised you, and to observe all His mitzvos, and to make you supreme over all the nations that He made, for praise, renown, and glory, and for you to be a holy people to Hashem your G-d, as He promised" (Ki Savo 26:16–19).

On the day Bnei Yisrael cross the Jordan, the covenant ceremony includes writing the Torah on Har Eival, building an altar of whole stones, and bringing offerings upon it; the declaration *לה' אלקיך*, "This day you have become a people to Hashem your G-d" (Ki Savo 27:9); and the blessings and curses on Har Gerizim and Har Eival, with the Kohanim and the Aron HaEdus between them. The blessings and curses are also pronounced in Arvos Moav before entry into Canaan. At the end of the parsha, Moshe Rabbeinu reviews the miracles performed for Bnei Yisrael from Egypt until their arrival in Arvos Moav.

The Joy of Bikkurim

The parsha begins with a person who has reached the land after the years of wandering and has settled in his country and inheritance. Hashem gives you the inheritance, and you *ורשתה וישבת בה*, "possess it and dwell in it" (Ki Savo 26:1). R' Shlomo Ephraim Luntschitz of sixteenth-century Poland explains, in *Kli Yakar*, that after conquest and settlement, people may be tempted to say that the land belongs to them and that they won it by their own sword, they may forget Hashem. That is why the verse says *והיה כי תבוא אל הארץ אשר* *והיה כי תבוא אל הארץ אשר*, "And it shall be, when you enter the land that Hashem your G-d gives you as an inheritance" (Ki Savo 26:1).

In truth, you do not enter the land as one who simply inherits property, since a house and wealth may be an ancestral inheritance. Rather, the land is given to you by Hashem as a gift, on condition that you repay Him by observing all His mitzvos. Yet your heart may imagine otherwise and say *ורשתה*, "you possessed it," as though it had become yours through your own power.

The Yerushalmi vividly describes how the bikkurim were brought from the agricultural regions to Yerushalayim: *כל העיירות שבמעמד* *כיצד מעלין את הבכורים?* *ולנין ברחובה של עיר*, ולא היו נכנסין לבתים. ולמשכים היה מתכנסות לעירו של מעמד, *הממונה אומר: קומו ונעלה ציון אל בית ה' אלקינו* *How were the bikkurim brought?* All the towns of the district gathered in the district town and spent the night in its public square, without entering the houses. In the morning, the appointed leader would say: Arise, and let us ascend to Tzion, to the House of Hashem our G-d" (Mishnah Bikkurim 3:2; Yerushalmi Bikkurim 11a). Rav Avraham Yitzchak Kook explains that the entire procession reinforced the educational lesson surrounding the mitzvah of bikkurim. It affirmed labor and effort, not parasitism or living at another's expense. It affirmed wealth, but not crooked wealth, only wealth produced through honest effort. The ox was adorned with olive branches, teaching that society cannot be satisfied with labor alone and must also possess spirit. Intellectual development, through which a person realizes his full potential, must accompany a working society. Work, certainly, but a religion of work, Heaven forbid. Sefer HaChinuch adds an important point about the mitzvah of bikkurim: when an idea rests in a person's heart and he wishes to bring it into action, the more he speaks about it, the more deeply it becomes part of him. The Torah therefore commands us to state explicitly how grateful we are to Hakadosh Baruch Hu for our success in the fields, as Scripture says: *הגדתי* *"I declare today to Hashem your G-d"* (Ki Savo 26:3). This brings us to recognize Hashem's goodness, to reach higher levels of gratitude, and to become worthy of asking for further blessing. Chazal taught: *"Whoever denies the good done for him by another will ultimately deny the good done for him by Hashem"* (see Midrash Tanchuma, Shemos 5).

A Positive Vidui

The beginning of the parsha commands the bringing of bikkurim to the Beis HaMikdash, and later commands vidui maasros, in which a person states that he has properly carried out Hashem's command, and thanks Him for the land and the Exodus from Egypt. Rav Kook, in *Ein Ayah* on Maaser Sheni, observes that this is not vidui in its usual sense of confessing sins, it is a

positive vidui, in which a person declares that he has done what is good in accordance with Hashem's will.

This teaches that although cheshbon hanefesh and self-criticism are generally necessary, a person must also pause at the appointed time to remember the good he has done and the virtues he possesses. From that recognition he gains strength to repair the weaker parts of himself. Such teshuvah reminds a person not only of his sins but also of his strengths, and thereby enables him to bring his first fruits in wholeness.

Vidui maasros is not recited annually, it is associated with the removal of tithes at the end of the third and sixth years of the Shemittah cycle. See Mishnah Maaser Sheni 5:6 and Mishneh Torah, Hilchos Maaser Sheni 11:1–3. Nor are bikkurim or vidui maasros practiced today, while the Beis HaMikdash is not standing, though the agricultural laws of terumos and maasros continue to apply in Eretz Yisrael under present-day halachic procedures.

Large Stones and Whole Stones

Rav Amnon Bazak discusses the two sets of stones that Bnei Yisrael were to erect on Har Eival upon entering the land.

The first set was intended for writing the words of the Torah: *והיה ביום אשר תעברו את הירדן אל הארץ אשר ה' אלקיך נתן לך*, והקמת לך אבנים גדולות ושדת אתם בשיד. *On the day that you cross the Jordan to the land that Hashem your G-d gives you, you shall set up large stones and coat them with plaster. You shall write upon them all the words of this Torah, when you cross"* (Ki Savo 27:2–3). Moshe Rabbeinu then repeats: *"You shall write upon the stones all the words of this Torah, explained well"* (Ki Savo 27:8).

The second set served as an altar: *מזבח אבנים*, לא תניף: *עליהם ברזל*. *אבנים שלמות תבנה את מזבח ה' אלקיך* *You shall build there an altar to Hashem your G-d, an altar of stones. You shall not raise iron upon them. With whole stones shall you build the altar of Hashem your G-d"* (Ki Savo 27:5–6).

The structure of the passage shows that this is one unit containing two commands for structures made of stone, one for writing the Torah and the other for offering sacrifices. What is the relationship between them? The first set expresses Bnei Yisrael's obligation to observe the Torah as the condition of dwelling in the land. The command was therefore to be fulfilled immediately upon entry: *והיה ביום אשר תבוא אל הארץ אשר ה' אלקיך נתן לך*, *"when you cross, so that you may enter the land that Hashem your G-d gives you"* (Ki Savo 27:3). On Har Eival would stand *עיבל* בהר *עיבל* על הקללה בהר *עיבל* *"These shall stand for the curse on Har Eival"* (Ki Savo 27:13), and there they would declare: *ארוך אשר לא יקם את דברי התורה הזאת לעשות אותם*, ואמר כל: *Cursed is the one who does not uphold the words of this Torah to perform them, and all the people shall say, Amen"* (Ki Savo 27:26). It is reasonable to understand "the words of this Torah" as referring to the Torah text written on the stones at that place. This set of stones therefore represents yirah, defining Bnei Yisrael's duties while dwelling in Eretz Yisrael.

The second set, the stones of the altar, represents love and rejoicing before Hashem: *"You shall slaughter peace offerings and eat there and rejoice before Hashem your G-d"* (Ki Savo 27:7). The korban shelamim, in addition to the korban olah which expresses yirah, embodies the bond between Hakadosh Baruch Hu and the person privileged to eat from the Divine table. It increases joy and expresses gratitude to Hakadosh Baruch Hu that the Jewish people have merited to enter their land. The two sets of stones, standing side by side, thus symbolize the two dimensions of serving Hashem in Eretz Yisrael: yirah and love. Perhaps the Torah's differing descriptions of the two sets are also symbolic. The stones bearing the Torah are גדולות, "large stones," a phrase that elsewhere in Tanach evokes yirah, as in *וה' השליך עליהם אבנים גדולות מן השמים* *"Hashem cast large stones upon them from heaven, as far as Azekah, and they died"* (Yehoshua 10:11). By contrast, the altar stones are whole stones, "untouched by iron" (Ki Savo 27:5–6), upon which shelamim are offered. Together, they express wholeness and peace...