

Zera Shimshon

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Chapter L: Ki Tavo (Deut. 26:1–29:8)

Essay 2. Expressing gratitude to the priest of one's generation

"אֲשֶׁר הִנֵּה בַיָּמִים הֵּהֱמָה", פִּרַשׁ רַש"י ו"ל אִין לָךְ אֶלָּא כִּהֵן שְׁבִימִיָּךְ כְּמוֹת שֶׁהוּא. קִשָּׁה מֵה צוּרָךְ בְּכֹאן לְאַנְשֵׁים גְּדוֹלִים. דְּבִשְׁלָמָא אִי הֵנְאִי בְּמִקּוּם הוֹרָאָה הֵנְא אֲתִי שְׁפִיר לְמִימֵר קִבֵּל מִמֶּנּוּ דְּבִרְיִי לְפִי שְׁיִפְתַּח בְּדוֹרוֹ כְּשִׁמוּאֵל בְּדוֹרוֹ, אָבֵל כָּאן הִכְהֵן אִין לוֹ כִּי אִם לְקַבֵּל הַדּוֹרוֹן. וּבְקוּשָׁא זֹה הִרְגִישׁ אֶף הַרְמַב"ן ו"ל לְפִירוּשׁוֹ עַל הַתּוֹרָה. וְעוֹד "וְאָמַרְתָּ אֵלָיו" שְׁאִינְךָ כְּפוּי טוֹבָה. מֵה צוּרָךְ שְׁיֵאמֵר זֶה וְהֵלָא מַעֲשֵׂיו מוֹכִיחִים עָלָיו שֶׁהוּא מְבִיא בְּפוּרִים?

“When you enter the land that the L-rd your G-d is giving you as a heritage, and you possess it and settle in it, you shall take some of every first fruit of the soil, which you harvest from the land that the L-rd your G-d is giving you, put it in a basket and go to the place where the L-rd your G-d will choose to establish His name. You shall go to the priest **that shall be in those days** and you shall say to him, ‘I acknowledge this day before the L-rd your G-d that I have entered the land that the L-rd swore to our fathers to assign us.’ ” (Deut. 26:1–3).

Rashi of blessed memory explains: “You have only the priest in your days, as he is.” In other words, don’t lament that the priest in your days isn’t as learned as one in past generations. **A difficulty is what need is there here for great people? Granted, that if I would have been in a place of instruction, it would have been nice to be able to say, receive from [the scholars] their words of Torah, as “Jephthah in his generation is like Samuel in his generation.”¹ But here, the priest only has to receive a gift.**

The Ramban of blessed memory felt this question in his explanation on the Torah, interpreting the verse to mean that one must come to the priest who is considered by him to be established and fit in those days.² **Also, “and you shall say to him,”** i.e., the intent of the following statement that one is to make to the priest, “I acknowledge this day . . .” is to show **“that you are not ungrateful.”³ What is the need for him to say this, for don’t his actions prove this, as he is bringing *bikurim* [the first-fruit offering]?**

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¹ Rosh Hashana 25b: “Jerubaal in his generation [is worthy of being treated] like Moses in his generation; Bedan in his generation is like Aaron in his generation; and Jephthah in his generation is like Samuel in his generation. [This serves] to teach you that even the lightest of the light [i.e., the least distinguished individual, once] he has been appointed as a leader over the community, he [must be treated] like the greatest of the great [and all are required to heed him and obey his rulings].”

² Ramban on Deut. 26:3.

³ Sifrei Devarim 299:1, and also brought by Rashi.

וגיש לומר דקדא מתורצת בנרד חברתה, לפי שהמזנה היא שהפכה מניח את גדו תחת גד הבועלים ומגיה, ועיקר התנופה היא לכנין לעצור רוחות רעות וגשמים וטללים רעים. ומשום הכי איצטרך לומר אין לה אלא פהו שבימיה פלומר אין לה להשוב ולומר וכי הפכה הנה חשוב וראוי לעצור וכו' בכוננת תפלתו, אלא אין לה אלא פהו שבימיה, והטעם הוא כי "ה' יראה ללבב" ואי לאו דלבו פונה למעלה ביראת ה' לא הנה עולה לגדולה.

One can say that one excuse is [that] “a woman is jealous only of the thigh of another [woman],”⁴ i.e., one shouldn’t think that a priest of a previous generation would have been better. For the mitzvah is that when the owner brings the basket with the first fruits, the priest places his hand under the hand of the owner and waves the basket in that manner, and the principle of the waving is intended to stop harmful winds and harmful rain and dews.⁵ Because of this, it’s necessary to say that you have only the priest in your days, as if to say that you shouldn’t think and say, “Is this priest important and fit to stop [the harmful winds, rain and dews] by his directed prayers?” Rather, you have only the priest in your days, and the sense is that “the L-rd sees into the heart” (I Samuel 16:7) and if [a man’s] heart is not open Heavenward in fear of G-d, he will not ascend to greatness.

ועוד שבעשית המזנה השפע מתפשט בעולם בקסד ה' אף אם העושה מזנה אינו מכנין ביה[ו]דים ובסודות. "ואמרת אליו" שאינה כפוי טובה שהנה אלו הרוחות רעות וטללים רעים רוב חכמי הטבע אומרים שהם באים מהשבעה פוכבי לכת ומהשמים עשרה מזלות. ושמא יאמר האדם מה שנתברכתי בשדי ובפרמי בשנה הזו אינו מפת תפלת הפהו אלא כי המזל והטבע הנה פד, לכן הנהירו "ואמרת אליו" דוקא שאינה כפוי טובה.

Also, in performing the mitzvah, abundance spreads in the world by G-d’s grace, even if the one performing the mitzvah is not directed to *yichudim*⁶ and *sodot*.⁷ “And you shall say to him” that you are not ungrateful, for [regarding] these harmful winds and harmful dew, the majority of students of nature say that they come from the seven classical planets⁸ and from the 12 constellations. Lest a person say that “I was blessed in my field and in my vineyard in this year, not from the power of the priest’s prayer, but rather because of the constellation and [because] nature is like that,” therefore “and you shall say to him” specifically that you are not ungrateful. I.e., recognize that the constellations have no effect on the Jewish people,⁹ and that you have confidence in the priest and in the ability of his prayers.

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⁴ Megillah 13a.

⁵ Sukkah 37b–38a, with regard to the two loaves offered on Shavuot: “Rabbi Yochanan said: [The priest] moves them to and fro [to dedicate them] to He Whom the four directions are His. He raises and lowers them to He Whom the heavens and earth are His. In the West [i.e., the Land of Israel], they taught it as follows. Rabbi Chama bar Ukva said that Rabbi Yosei, son of Rabbi Chanina, said: [The priest] moves them to and fro in order to request a halt to harmful winds [storms and tempests that come from all directions]; he raises and lowers them in order to halt harmful dews [and rains that come from above]. Rabbi Yosei bar Avin said, and some say [that it was] Rabbi Yosei bar Zevila [who said]: That is to say, non-essential aspects of a mitzva avert calamity, as waving is a non-essential aspect of the mitzva [since even if one failed to wave the loaves he fulfilled his obligation], and [nevertheless] it halts harmful winds and dews. And Rava said: And likewise [one should conduct himself the same way] with a *lulav* [i.e., one should wave it to and fro and raise and lower it for the same reasons].”

⁶ Unification of supernal elements in (and by) one's mystical devotions.

⁷ Kabbalistic secrets.

⁸ Saturn [שבתאי], Jupiter [צדק], Mars [מאדים], Mercury [חמה], Venus [נהגה], Sun [פוכב], and the Moon [לבנה].

⁹ Thus said Rav and Rabbi Yochanan, in Shabbat 156a.