

INSIGHTS

Into The Weekly Parsha

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This week's Insights is dedicated in loving memory of Dovid Nochum ben Yisrael, Reb Dovid Faigen. "May his Neshama have an Aliya!"

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16 ELUL

Based on the Torah of our Rosh HaYeshiva HaRav Yochanan Zweig

PARSHAS KI SAVO

Connectivity

When you come to the land that Hashem your Lord is giving you as a heritage, occupying and settling it. You shall take the first of every fruit of the ground produced by the land that Hashem your Lord is giving you, and you shall place it in a basket and go to the place Hashem will choose as the place associated with His name (26:1-2).

This week's *parsha* opens with the obligation of the *mitzvah* of *bikkurim*. To perform the *mitzvah* of *bikkurim*, a farmer in Eretz Yisroel would go out to his field, find his first budding fruits, and tie reeds around them, thus designating them as "first fruits" (this applied only to fruits of the seven species of the land of Israel: wheat, barley, grapes, figs, pomegranates, olives, and dates). He would then create a beautiful "fruit basket" (the wealthy would bring baskets of gold or silver) and with some pomp and ceremony march off to the Beis Hamikdash to present it to the Kohen. He then gave it to the Kohen while expressing his appreciation for all that Hashem had done for him as well as for Bnei Yisroel.

Rashi (ad loc) explains that the end of the verse – "*occupying and settling it*" – teaches us that Bnei Yisroel were not obligated in the *mitzvah* of *bikkurim* until they conquered the land and apportioned it. In other words, this *mitzvah* didn't begin until fourteen years after Bnei Yisroel entered the land of Israel.

In light of this, we must strive to explain a difficult Sifri: *עשה מצוה. כי תבוא אל הארץ. – האמורה בענין שבשכרה תיכנס לארץ – do this mitzvah in order that you should merit entering the land.* How can entering the land of Israel possibly be predicated on fulfillment of this *mitzvah* when the

obligation to do the *mitzvah* didn't take effect until fourteen years after entering the land? This question was first raised 250 years ago by the well-known Rav Dovid Pardo in his commentary on the Sifri. In fact, he finds it so perplexing that he writes that there must be a mistake in the text and he amends it. Obviously, this approach is difficult to accept.

The key to this Sifri lies in the understanding of the word "תיכנס". Generally, we translate this word as "to enter," but we see from Chazal that this is not a proper translation. There is a fascinating Gemara (*Shabbos* 32a) relating to the terminology we use for shuls (בית כנסת): "R' Yishmael Ben Eleazar says that ignorant individuals die prematurely for two sins; for calling the 'Holy Ark' a chest and for calling a shul ('*beis knesses*') 'a gathering place' ('*beis am*')." Rashi further explains that referring to a shul as a place where people gather is denigrating.

Maharsha (ad loc) finds this very difficult and points out that the word in Hebrew – "*beis knesses*" – also means a gathering place. So why were the ignorant punished for calling it *beis am*, which seems to merely be another translation?

Maimonides (*Yad Hilchos Tefillah* 11:1) makes a fascinating statement: "Any place that has ten Jews is required to build a house for them to enter in and



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pray at all the required times. This place is called a *beis haknesses*." What does Rambam mean by the words "for them to enter – שייכנסו בו"? Rambam could have easily left those words out and the meaning of the sentence would have been exactly the same. What is the point of writing "for them to enter"?

Maimonides is teaching us what a shul is all about. The words don't merely mean to enter, they mean to connect. We shouldn't view a shul as a place we gather (a '*beis am*'), rather we must view a shul as a place we connect to each other. That is what the obligation of building a shul is all about. We don't build a shul to just have a place to *daven*, we build it as a place to connect as a people. We find many instances in Chazal of this concept (*Hachnosas Orchim* – *Machnisei Shabbos*, etc.). Ignorant people don't understand this, they think a shul is merely a place Jews go to gather and pray, but they are missing the very essence of what a shul is supposed to be.

That's what the Sifri in this *parsha* is saying. It isn't referring to the initial entering of Eretz Yisroel. Rather, the *mitzvah* of *bikkurim*, whenever it is done, will cause a person to be merited to be **connected** to the land of Israel.

Mind Your Mind

Hashem will strike you with madness and with blindness and confounding of the heart (28:28).

The latter half of this week's *parsha* informs us, in very explicit detail, of all the calamitous consequences that will befall us for not properly following in the path of Torah and *mitzvos*. Concerning this verse, the Ibn Ezra (ad loc) writes that they refer to illnesses of the mind. From this Ibn Ezra we see something remarkable regarding illnesses of the mind.

A number of years ago a man who was in a desperate state came to see the Rosh HaYeshiva. He was highly educated and held a Master's in Engineering from an Ivy League school, where he had graduated with honors. Previously, he had headed a large construction firm with many employees and his firm had offices occupying over a 100,000 square feet of space. Then came the financial crash, his business fell apart, and he was forced to close it down. Moreover, he had personally guaranteed the business leases, so he was sued for payment, which led to his personal financial ruin. Things deteriorated to the point that he and his wife were forced to move into their son's home.

He was despondent and asked the Rosh HaYeshiva for some guidance. The Rosh HaYeshiva tried to console him and offer some advice for moving forward: "Why don't you go back to

school and learn another profession?" The man responded that it was an impossibility as he had recently been diagnosed with ADHD and would not be able to focus on his studies. Here was a man who had an advanced degree from a prestigious school, where he had graduated with honors, and all of the sudden he had a learning disability?

When a person suffers trauma in their life one of the oft overlooked consequences is what this trauma does to the mind. According to both the NIH and a Harvard medical school study, about 5% of the population suffers from ADHD. Yet there are many districts in the country where the diagnoses and prescribe rate for ADHD are more than triple the accepted rate. In one NIH study, children who lived within thirty kilometers of Chernobyl and had subsequently been relocated to Ukraine for ten years were testing positively for ADHD at a rate of almost 20%.

Ever wonder why so many illnesses are being treated today at rates that were unheard of decades ago? Of course, part of the answer is that there is better testing today, but another significant percentage is due to the fact that today so many more children are products of broken or

unstable homes where their parents themselves are emotional wrecks. Today, many children are being raised by proxy with video games and social media platforms acting as their guide to the realities of life. There is very little emotional validation in their lives. Is it any wonder they are having issues coping?

The toll that the physical and financial failures will have on Bnei Yisroel's emotional state are no small portion of the terrible consequences of the punishments that Hashem doles out for not following in His ways. However, much of this reaction is within our power to control. This is part of the lesson that is being taught: We need to take control and responsibility for our reactions.

Have you ever had someone come to you and apologize for saying something unkind or inappropriate? Often it goes something like this: "I am sorry I yelled at you for something so silly, please forgive me, it's just who I am." What they are really telling you is, "that's who I want to be." In other words, instead of working on themselves they expect you to just tolerate their boorish behavior. One of the lessons of the *tochacha* is that we must constantly work to improve who we are and take responsibility for our own emotional state.



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