

WHEN CAN ONE REALLY ENJOY LIFE?

Category: Devarim, Ki Savo

How far do we go to ensure the comfort of others?

Saying Thank You

“What’s the Magic Word?”

How many times have you asked your kids this question? Every child knows that if they want something, they’d better have those two magic words ready: “Please” and “Thank you.” It’s practically a parenting law!

This idea of saying thank you isn’t just a modern-day invention. It goes all the way back to this week’s Torah portion, where we learn about the mitzvah of *bikkurim*. This was the commandment for every Jew to bring the first ripe fruits of their harvest to the Holy Temple as a way of expressing gratitude to G-d for His blessings.

And it wasn’t just any fruit. The Torah specifies that *bikkurim* was only for the seven species that the Land of Israel is praised for: wheat, barley, grapes, figs, pomegranates, dates, and olives.

Here’s the interesting part: this mitzvah was given to the Jewish people right as they were about to enter the Land of Israel. But they couldn’t start bringing their *bikkurim* right away. They had to wait until the entire land was conquered and divided up among all the people—a process that took fourteen years!

Now, you’d think that once a Jew got his land and saw his crops flourishing, he could immediately run to the Temple with his basket of fruit and say, “Thank you, G-d!” But no—G-d said, “Not yet.” Even if one Jew was already enjoying a bumper crop, he had to wait until every single Jew had their piece of land.

The reason behind this mitzvah lies in the very essence of the Jewish people.

If Someone Else Is Lacking

Bikkurim was all about expressing gratitude to G-d for His overflowing blessings. The first fruits had to be brought to Jerusalem in a joyful procession—and that is the catch: one Jew couldn't fully celebrate their own good fortune if they knew another Jew still hadn't received their share of the land. That's why no one could bring *bikkurim* until every single Jew was settled. If even one Jew was left out, the joy would be incomplete. There'd be a piece of G-d's kindness still missing.

A similar idea appears when it comes to praying for rain. We all know that Jews ask for rain during the winter and for dew in the summer. On the last day of Sukkot, we start praising G-d for making the wind blow and the rain fall. But, oddly enough, we hold off on actually *asking* for rain until the 7th of Cheshvan, a full fifteen days later. Why? Well, the Alter Rebbe explains in *Shulchan Aruch* that while Israel desperately needs rain after Sukkot to grow food, they postpone asking for it until the Jews living near the Euphrates—who had the longest journey home—could return without getting drenched.

The Rebbe pointed out that this delay shows the deep love Jews have for one another. Rain in Israel is literally a life-and-death matter—without it, there's no food. But the inconvenience of the Jews traveling from the Euphrates? That's just about avoiding soggy sandals. Still, the love and concern for every Jew meant that even a slight inconvenience for one person took precedence over something as critical as rain for the survival of the entire nation.

We find yet another example of this in the Midrash. Rabbi Simeon explains why the manna—G-d's miraculous food in the desert—could taste like anything except certain foods like cucumbers, watermelons, leeks, onions, and garlic. Why? Because these foods aren't good for nursing mothers.

Once again, the Rebbe highlights the greatness of the Jewish people. Think about it: in the desert, there were about 600,000 men between the ages of 20 and 60. Add in the older men, younger boys, unmarried girls, and women past childbearing age, and you'll see that nursing mothers were a very small minority. Yet, no one could taste these particular foods in their manna just to make sure that these few nursing mothers wouldn't feel left out, seeing others enjoying the taste of watermelon and craving it for themselves.

This teaches us a profound lesson: a Jew naturally feels it's worth it for *everyone* to have a little less if it means sparing discomfort for even the smallest minority. It's a built-in instinct to care about the well-being of every single person, no matter how small their group may be.

Spiritual Responsibility

So, what's the takeaway from this week's Torah portion?

In a *ma'amar*, the Rebbe reflects on the famous verse about Abraham, where it says, "He called there in the name of G-d." The deeper explanation is that not only did Abraham call out to G-d, but he also caused *others* to call in G-d's name. The Rebbe explains that if you want to strengthen your own connection with G-d, the first step is to help others find that connection too.

In other words, no Jew can fully enjoy their own relationship with G-d while knowing that there are countless others who don't even know He exists. How can you enjoy the prayers of Rosh Hashanah or the atmosphere of Yom Kippur if you haven't done everything in your power to bring another Jew closer to their heritage, closer to G-d?

But once you've helped another Jew taste the spiritual sweetness of Judaism, once you've made that connection for them, the pleasure you'll feel in your own relationship with G-d will be doubled.