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by Rabbi Yaakov Finestone

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THE LEAST I COULD DO IS TO SAY THANK YOU!

PARSHAS KI SAVO

Many years ago, Rav Moshe Feinstein zt"l attended a wedding and gave the couple a check for \$500. In those days, \$500 was an enormous amount for a wedding gift. The choson told his father that Rav Moshe must have added an extra zero on the check by mistake. After sheva brachos, the father and the couple went to Rav Moshe's apartment and asked him if he in fact had made a mistake in writing the check. Rav Moshe told them, "If I could, I would give you a check for \$5,000!! Your grandfather was Rav Pesach Prushkin. I learned Torah with him. I feel such gratitude to your grandfather that I wanted to give you a big present. Unfortunately, I can't afford to give you more than \$500."

Parshas Ki Savo begins with the mitzvah of bringing *Bikurim*, the first fruits of one's produce. The farmer brought his first fruits to the Kohen in Yerushalayim, to express gratitude to Hashem for a successful crop.

The first words of the Torah are, "בְּרֵאשִׁית בָּרָא אֱלֹהִים". **Midrash**

Rabba (Bereishis 1:4) says that the world was created, בְּשֵׁבִיל רֵאשִׁית, for the sake of things that are called "*raishis*", first. The Torah, the Jewish People, and *Bikurim* are all called "*raishis*". That means that Hashem created the world for each of these three.

What is so unique about the mitzvah of *Bikurim*? Why would this mitzvah be the reason for Hashem creating the world? The **Alschich** explains that the mitzvah of *Bikkurim* demonstrates *haKaras haTov*, gratitude to Hashem. *HaKaras haTov* is so important that the whole world was created just for this mitzvah, which teaches us the importance of the attribute of gratitude.

"And you shall then proclaim and say before Hashem, 'The Aramite destroy[ed] my forefather, then he descended to Egypt and lived there with a tiny community; and there he became a great people, powerful and numerous.'"
(Devarim 26:5)

The **Brisker Rav** zt"l says that although a person may have bad character traits, he remains a human being, albeit a flawed human being. However, if one does not show gratitude, he is no longer considered a human being! The **Vilna Gaon** zt"l says that we must remember the kindness that someone did for

us. When we pay back the favor we are doing more than being nice. We are fulfilling a Torah obligation!

What Hashem wants is for us to express our gratitude to Him. Truthfully, it is impossible to repay Hashem for the myriad acts of kindnesses that Hashem has done and continues to do for our ancestors and for us. Every breath we take, and every movement we make is a gift to us from Hashem.

When we show gratitude to other people that is the first step in acknowledging that we must show gratitude to Hashem. One who is ungrateful towards his fellow man is ultimately ungrateful towards Hashem. One who is an ingrate to his boss, his friends, his spouse, his parents, and his

neighbor will eventually come to deny the numerous kindnesses of Hashem.

When the farmer brings his first fruits, he recites what is called Parshas Bikurim. Therein, he expresses his gratitude to Hashem for granting him a successful crop. In addition, he thanks Hashem for saving the Jews throughout history, enabling the farmer to come to this point, this joyous occasion. The farmer thanks Hashem for saving our forefather Yaakov from the evil designs of Lavan. He continues thanking Hashem for saving the Jewish People from the extreme bondage in Egypt and making us into a great nation. Then he thanks Hashem for bringing us into Eretz Yisroel enabling him to grow fruit and bring it to the Beis HaMikdash.

The question is, if the parsha of Bikurim is giving a historical perspective for which to be thankful, why doesn't it begin from the time of our forefather Avraham or why not later, from the time of the exodus from Egypt? Why does it start with Yaakov?

Rabbi Yissocher Frand says that since the mitzvah of Bikurim is about showing gratitude, it

makes sense to start from Yaakov. In general, no one is more capable of expressing gratitude as much as one who had difficulties in life which were resolved. When one is healthy, when one has a livelihood and when one does have nachas, he will sometimes take it for granted and forget to thank Hashem for those gifts. On the other hand, one who experiences struggles is in a better position to appreciate Hashem when he is saved from those struggles.

In Parshas Bikurim, the farmer thanks Hashem for giving us our own land after being slaves and after wandering in the desert. We were homeless for so long. Our forefather, Yaakov, was the only one of the Avos who knew what it meant to be homeless. He had to leave home, fearing he would be killed by his brother, Esav. He spent 20 years being oppressed by Lavan. After settling in Eretz Yisroel, he, again, had to leave to descend to Egypt to spend the rest of his life. By tracing our "homelessness" back to our forefather, Yaakov, we can better appreciate the contrast of finally having our own land.

Showing our appreciation and gratitude to others is what makes us a mensch! It is also a Torah obligation! It is IMPOSSIBLE to repay Hashem for the infinite kindness that He does for us. The very least we can do is show Hashem our gratitude.

(based on The Power of a Vort by Rabbi Yissochor Frand and Rabbi Frand on Torah.org)

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Rabbi Yaakov Finestone is the director of JEP Queens. For almost 50 years JEP Queens has been in the forefront of kiruv. JEP has changed the lives of thousands of Jewish children enrolled in public schools and kiruv schools. Many are shomrei Torah and mitzvos today because of JEP.

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