

A SHAVUOS READER

5772/2012



YESHIVA

OF GREATER WASHINGTON

In Loving Memory

לעילוי נשמת

Our mother and grandmother

Mrs. Ida Hershenson

חיה ריבא בת גרשון מאיר הכהן

ז' סיון תשמ"ז

by

Marvin and Michelle Hershenson and family

Jared and Jessica Hershenson and family

The Song of Life

By Rabbi Daniel Kramer, Alumnus, Yeshiva Gedolah/ Kollel Zichron Amram

“You shall rejoice with all the good that Hashem your G-d, has granted you and your household; you, the Levite, and the stranger who is among you.” (Devarim 26:11).

This *pasuk* is a description of the joy a person is to feel when he brings the first fruits, the *Bikkurim*, to the Kohein in the Beis Hamikdash. The Mishna further describes the procession of the farmers bringing the *Bikkurim* to Yerushalayim:

“... an ox went before them with its horns overlaid with gold and a crown of olive leaves on its head. The flute played before them until they drew close to Yerushalayim. When they had arrived near to Yerushalayim they sent messengers before them, and they adorned their *bikkurim*. The governors, the chiefs and the treasurers went out to meet them... And all the craftsmen in Yerushalayim stood before them and greeted them, “Brethren of such-and-such a place, be welcome!” The flute played before them until they arrived at the Beis Hamikdash... When the court of the Beis Hamikdash was reached the Levi'im sang (Tehillim 30) “I will raise You, Hashem, for You have raised me up and You have not made my enemies to rejoice over me”. (Bikkurim 3:3-4)”

The performance of this mitzvah brought with it an unprecedented amount of joy, happiness, and involvement from the whole community. It was accompanied by its own song of the Levi'im as well. What is the connection between this particular chapter of Tehillim and the mitzvah of Bikkurim? To answer this question we need to understand both what this chapter is all about and what the meaning of the mitzvah of Bikkurim is.

When a person would bring the Bikkurim to the Beis Hamikdash they would read a paragraph from the Torah (Devarim 26:5-10):

“An Aramean [sought to] destroy my forefather, and he went down to Egypt and sojourned there with a small number of people, and there, he became a great, mighty, and numerous nation. And the Egyptians treated us cruelly and afflicted us, and they imposed hard labor upon us. So we cried out to

Hashem, G-d of our fathers, and Hashem heard our voice and saw our affliction, our toil, and our oppression. And Hashem brought us out from Egypt with a strong hand and with an outstretched arm, with great awe, and with signs and wonders. And He brought us to this place, and He gave us this land, a land flowing with milk and honey. And now, behold, I have brought the first of the fruit of the ground which you, Hashem, have given to me.”

Many commentaries have asked, why the whole long story? Why do we have to start from the beginning in order to express our gratitude to Hashem for the fruits He provided us? Shouldn't we just say thanks for the great land and fruits You gave us?

The Rambam (Moreh Nevuchim 3:39) explains the idea behind this entire declaration. He says the pronouncement made is an act of humility to let people know that despite the fact that he is bringing the fruits of his own labor, he is proclaiming that everything he has is from Hashem. Regarding why he mentions the slavery in Egypt and previous troubles, the Rambam states, “This ceremony teaches man that it is essential in the service of Hashem to remember the times of trouble and the history of past distress, in days of comfort.” As the Rambam stated earlier, this is an aspect of humility; however, there is another aspect of Avodas Hashem built into this statement that we will explore.

In Yirmiyahu (31:12) it says, “ I will turn their mourning into joy and will comfort them and make them rejoice from their sorrow.” The Malbim comments, “All who remember the sorrow of the past enhance the happiness of the present.” The prophet Yirmiyahu is telling us that in order to truly appreciate the happy state that we will be in at the time of the final redemption, we must always remember the hardships that it took to get us there. We have to recognize that all that happens to us, even the difficult things, is for the best end result and enhances it. Everything is from Hashem, and it is easiest to recognize this when we finally arrive at the goodness in the end. At the time of the redemption we will finally recognize how all the hardships of the exile fit into Hashem's grand plan, and we will be able to celebrate and rejoice with this knowledge.

Perhaps this is the idea behind the declaration at the time of bringing the Bikkurim to the Beis Hamikdash. In order to appreciate all that Hashem has given us, all the success we have enjoyed by reaping a bountiful harvest, we have to think back to the times when it was not so good. In order to appreciate the land Hashem has given us, the land that produced this harvest, we have to remember the time when

we weren't even a nation and were strangers in a strange land. This is not only an exercise of humility, but it is also a lesson in true happiness. At the end, we can be happy not only for the bounty but even for the sweat and toil of the difficult times of labor as well.

This idea is perhaps the reason the Levi'im sang the 30th chapter of Tehillim when the Bikkurim were brought to the Beis Hamikdash. This concept of incorporating past difficulty into the present happiness is an ongoing theme in that chapter. Rabbi Shimson Raphael Hirsch explains the *pasuk* (v. 6), "weeping will tarry for the night, and joy will come with the morning" to mean, "when the coming dawn is only anticipated, shall we be able to rejoice in the beneficial results of that which at first seemed to be cause for tears." At the end of the chapter it says (v. 12), "You have turned my lament into dancing for me; You loosened my sackcloth and girded me with joy." R' Hirsch comments, "I came to the realization that the very same event I deplored as a step toward the grave was actually one of the most blissful import." Again we see this important approach to sadness and times of difficulty. A look back from outside the situation gives the proper outlook that even the difficult times contribute to our success and in the end will be incorporated into part of the celebration.

The Shem Mishmuel (Ki Savo 5678) observed a distinction between the mitzvah of Bikkurim and all other agricultural mitzvos. He notes that in the performance of all mitzvos of the land such as Terumah, Ma'aser, and Challah, the mitzvah is done with the produce after it is cleaned and refined from all the chaff and waste. The mitzvah of Bikkurim is performed with the fruit or grain when it is still in its natural state. Why is this so? Perhaps we could explain this based on what we have already discussed. The mitzvah of Bikkurim is done with the joy of a person's successes. In order to truly appreciate those successes they must ponder the difficult times they endured to arrive at this point. A person must, therefore, perform this mitzvah with all the parts of the fruit – even the part that will be discarded - to demonstrate this concept.

The *pasuk* that we began with says, "You shall rejoice with **all** the good." What is the emphasis of "all" the good? The Gemara (Arachin 11a) cites this *pasuk* as the source in the Torah for the fact that we sing a song – Shira - at the bringing of the Bikkurim. The Malbim (Devarim 26:11) explains that the *drasha* from this *pasuk* is specific to which Shira is sung., namely, that the emphasis on the word ""**all**" the good" teaches us not only that they sang Shira, but that they sang the thirtieth chapter of Tehillim. **All** is an emphasis on an **all**-inclusive joy. It is teaching us a joy that allows us to reflect on the hardships of the past and include them in our

present celebration. This “**all**” fits hand in hand with the themes of Tehillim 30, and is the *drasha* that teaches us that it belongs at the ceremony of Bikkurim.

At this Yom Tov as we celebrate of the joy of the giving of the Torah and of the reaping of the harvest, we should merit to the final redemption when we can look back and turn our “mourning into joy” and “rejoice from our sorrow.” We should merit the rebuilding of the Beis Hamikdash, where we can bring the Bikkurim and experience the fullest happiness of “You shall rejoice with **all** the good that Hashem, your G-d, has granted you.”

In Loving Memory

לעילוי נשמת

We remember our friend
Mrs. Faye Lichbach *a"h*

מרגלית מאשא בת שמשון אשר

who was a longtime supporter of the
Reader Series, and who would dedicate
the Shavuos Reader in memory of her
parents,

Mr. Sidney Sharp

שמשון אשר בן יחיאל מאיר

Mrs. Gladys Sharp

טובה גיטעל בת משה מיכאל הכהן

תהא נפשם צרורים בצרור החיים

Of Angels and Cheeseburgers

By Rabbi Yitzchak Scher/Kollel Zichron Amram/Yeshiva of Greater Washington

The Shavuos cheesecake has taken its seat alongside hamantashen, latkas, kneidlach, and gefilte fish as a traditional Yom Tov cuisine. Many of the more carnivorous Jews amongst us must grapple begrudgingly with a dairy spread at the Shavuos meals. This is all due to the popular and well founded custom of enjoying dairy foods on Shavuos.

Two of the most well-known explanations of this custom are offered by the Rem" a and the Mishna Berurah. The Mishna Berurah¹ explains that upon receiving the Torah at Mount Sinai, the Jews were now bound by the laws of Kashrus. Preparing kosher meat is a much more complex and lengthy process than preparing a kosher dairy meal. Hence, at Mount Sinai they ate dairy. On Shavuos, we follow in suit and prepare dairy foods too, as we re-experience receiving the Torah at Mount Sinai. The Rem" a² offers a different reason for eating dairy. He explains that in truth one should have milk and meat at the same meal on Shavuos; first dairy foods and then meat foods³. The rationale for such a halachically "daring" move is to remember the *Shtei Halechem* offering that was offered in the Beis Hamikdash every Shavuos. The *Shtei Halechem*, as its name suggests, consisted of two loaves of bread. Halachically, one is prohibited from using bread eaten first at a dairy meal with a meat meal or vice versa⁴. Therefore, if one serves dairy first and wishes to have bread with the meat part of the meal, a second loaf must be used. Halachically obligating ourselves to use two loaves of bread at the meal commemorates the two loaves of bread used in the Beis Hamikdash for the *Shtei Halechem* offering. Many other explanations are offered in addition to the above two reasons.

However, the connection between Shavuos and the prohibition of *basar b'cholov* (meat and milk) seems to run much deeper than the above reasoning. In addition to the holiday's typical name, the Torah refers to Shavuos also as *Yom HaBikkurim*, the day of the first-fruits⁵. This refers to the fact that Shavuos marks the harvest

¹ Orach Chaim 494:12

² Orach Chaim 494:3

³ Please consult with your Rabbi concerning the halachic procedures required to permit serving both milk and meat at the same meal.

⁴ Yoreh Deah 89:4

⁵ Bamidbar 28:26

season and the beginning of the yearly mitzvah of bringing one's first fruits to the Beis Hamikdash. The prohibition of milk and meat appears three times in the Torah. Interestingly, two of those three times the verse is repeated verbatim: "The first fruits of your land shall you bring to the house of Hashem your G-d; you shall not cook a kid in the milk of its mother."⁶ Twice the Torah juxtaposes the mitzvah of *Bikkurim* with the prohibition of milk and meat. With full awareness that nothing in Hashem's Torah is random, a careful reader must wonder what the connection is between these two seemingly random mitzvos. They have such a strong association that the connection is emphasized twice in the Torah! Since Shavuos is *Yom HaBikkurim*, we can't help but sense how our custom of eating dairy on Shavuos seems to flow right from this verse. On Shavuos, we take out the dairy foods in the middle of our typical *fleishig* Yom Tov cuisine, often with all the *fleishig* dishes out in the kitchen and the *fleishig* oven on, and actively observe the laws of separating milk and meat. This point is especially pronounced according to Rem"a's suggested practice of eating milk and meat at the very same meal, being extremely careful to take all halachic precautions to keep them separate. It is a proactive display of observing the command to separate meat and milk! How do we understand this practice?

Another striking source for the connection between *Matan Torah* and *Basar B'cholov* is found in a Midrash⁷:

When Moshe came down [from Mount Sinai] and the Jews sinned and the tablets were broken, the angels rejoiced and said: "now the Torah will be returned to us." When Moshe ascended to receive the second tablets the angels said to Hashem: "Master of the World, did the Jews not violate the Torah? For You wrote in it 'you shall not have any other gods.' Hashem said to them, "You are always instigating trouble between Me and the Jewish people! Didn't you eat meat and milk when you went to Avrohom as it says 'and he took butter, milk and a calf [and fed it to the angels]'- but even a Jewish child, when he comes home from school [knows to separate meat and milk]!" [The angels] had no response. At that time Hashem told Moshe "write these words down now while they have no response."

This Midrash seems to say that the entire merit of the Jews receiving the Torah is predicated upon their adherence to *Basar B'cholov*. The angels who did not observe this mitzvah are unworthy of receiving the Torah. However, the Jews, who

⁶ Shemos 23:19 and 34:26

⁷ Midrash Shochar Tov Chapter 8

are devoted to separating meat and milk to the extent that even school children are fully observant of the mitzvah, are worthy of receiving the Torah! This Midrash is quite surprising. As important as separating meat and milk is in Jewish life, one usually would not consider that it's the basis of the entire Torah. Furthermore, angels are not obligated in mitzvos anyways and thus did nothing wrong by consuming meat with milk. Why does Hashem accuse them of wrongdoing?

We can unlock the message of our seemingly innocent custom of eating milk on Shavuos by acquiring a deeper understanding of the prohibition of *Basar B'cholov*.

In a general sense, we can classify living beings in to three categories: plants, animals, and humans. Each one of these categories functions differently in the world. Plants, in general, perform two main tasks: they take in nutrition (survival) and reproduce. Even the fruits produced by plants are usually only a means for its seeds to be nourished, protected, and scattered, enabling reproduction.

Animal life is more sophisticated and complex. Animals are mobile. They have social interactions, build nests, hunt, and may even claim territory for themselves. Many have refined skills, ambitions, and extremely effective methods of attaining food and protecting themselves and their young. Chazal even portray certain virtues that can be learned from observing animals⁸. However, upon further analysis, as sophisticated as animals may be, their actions too seem to pivot around the above-mentioned "life-goals" of plant life: survival and reproduction. The lion will conquer land with strength, stealth, and skill but only with the intent of acquiring the water hole in the middle of his territory and the lionesses with which he will mate. So too, other animals, in their own ways, focus on these very same goals. Animals utilize refined skills and wisdom, but only for the lowly goals of plant life.

The human being is totally different. We are created in the image of G-d⁹, with a divine soul implanted within us¹⁰. We are partly physical and coarse but partly spiritual and elevated. We are created to live within the physical world but yet strive to connect with higher worlds and a higher purpose. This, indeed, is exactly the challenge of the human being. Rashi¹¹ explains that a manifestation of the divine aspect of a person is found in the human mind that demonstrates a keen ability to understand and discern. He must use his advanced wisdom to choose to

⁸ Eruvin 100b, Avos 5:20

⁹ Bereishis 1:27

¹⁰ Bereishis 2:7

¹¹ Bereishis 1:27

live a spiritual life energized by his *neshama* and the divine, and not to live a physical life motivated by his physical body created of “dust of the earth.” One can choose to be godly, or choose to follow in the footsteps of the animals and plants of the world! The ability to make this choice is found in the human intellect. Unlike the animal, the human can succeed in having his intellect override his animalistic instincts, urges, and desires. However, if the human mind is not engaged or does not have clarity of purpose, the animalistic side will inevitably prevail resulting in the human being living as merely a highly sophisticated, complex, and ambitious “plant”. Like the lion claiming his territory, the successful human being will use his talents and wealth to acquire his own “lionesses and water-holes”.

Rav Shimshon Raphael Hirsch¹² beautifully demonstrates that the above message is the symbolism contained within the prohibition of *Basar B'cholov*. Rav Hirsch explains that the material which characterizes the “vegetative side” of animal life is milk. Milk is the first and most basic nourishment consumed by a mammal, and is secreted by the mother as a result of reproduction. Therefore, milk is the substance symbolizing the drives for nourishment and reproduction within an animal. In contrast, the flesh of the animal represents its “animal” side. The muscles, power, movement, and prowess of the animal are evident within the meat. Reintroducing the meat into the milk symbolically expresses the antithesis of what it means to be human. Allowing the meat, i.e. the animal side containing skill, power, and ambition, to be utilized in pursuit of plant-like goals, is the opposite of what a human being is designed to do. Animals allow their unique power and talents to assist them in pursuing their plant-like objectives. We, as humans, must be sure to use our intellect to moderate and guide our activities so they are channeled only towards Hashem and His Will. We must take in nourishment and reproduce, but only based on the will of the Creator. We utilize our animal side and our plant side to serve Hashem, but not to have each side service one another. We must make sure that our milk and meat remain separate. Mixing the two would be a symbolic replication of a human being descending to animalistic behavior. (“You are what you eat.”)

The Torah addresses the spiritual side of the human being. It is a system both in thought and in action to lift the person above the bounds of this world and cast him into a spiritual lifestyle. The Torah teaches us how to live within the physical world, but not be subjugated to physical desires. Mitzvos and Torah study train the body and mind to not give in to their animalistic or vegetative elements, but rather

¹² In his commentary on the Torah, Shemos 23:19

to subordinate these elements and channel the entire being to the service of Hashem. Our actions are dictated not by lust nor by instinct, but rather by the will of the Creator.

“And Hashem descended upon Mount Sinai¹³.” Rashi explains this verse to mean that Hashem “bent the heavens and spread them on the mountain.” This can be understood to mean that when the Torah was given at Mount Sinai, a bridge was created between Heaven and Earth. At the point of *Matan Torah* heaven and Earth touched. Now the human being with his feet firmly planted on the ground, can have a way to have his mind, body, and essence reach the highest realms.

The great *Tanna*, Rebbe, declares in the Gemara¹⁴ that an *Am Haaretz* (ignoramus) is forbidden to eat meat. Rashi explains that this is because *Amei Haaretz* are similar to animals in that they have no ability to understand. This means that one who does not have the benefits of wisdom is as if he is on an equal plane with animals, therefore he has no right to eat them. He himself behaves like an animal. However, one who immerses in Torah study has tapped into his unique human side, lifted himself above animal life, and as their superior, can consume their meat.

Angels are not touched by the above struggle. A human is created as a hybrid of the divine soul and dust of the earth and thereby must toil to ensure that his spiritual side wins and does not become suppressed by his earthly, animalistic drives. Angels are totally spiritual beings and do not run the risk of becoming animalistic. They have no earthly desires or instincts and consequently can mix milk with meat bearing no impact on their essence. Accordingly, they can feast¹⁵ on *basar b'cholov* in the home of Avrohom without any regrets¹⁶. However, Hashem still tells them that because of this, they are unworthy of receiving the Torah. The Torah is meant to be given to a being that has free choice and must contend with a physical side. The Torah is the tool that this being is to use to overcome animalistic tendencies. Angels are not the ones who need Torah because they are not involved with this struggle.

¹³ Shemos 19:20

¹⁴ Pesachim 49b

¹⁵ The fact that a totally spiritual being can “eat” is a question which must be addressed but is beyond the scope of this article.

¹⁶ The Chok Yaakov (Orach Chaim 494:11) cites an opinion that one can be lenient with the waiting period between meat and milk on Shavuos. (He himself says one should not rely upon this leniency.) The Noam Elimelech explains the reason for this leniency. He says that the Torah enables us to be like angels. Angels have no issue eating *basar b'cholov*, as explained. We too, as we accept the Torah and strive to utilize it to make ourselves spiritual like angels, can also be lenient with this mixture on Shavuos. (However, as stated above, don't try this at home!)

The above Midrash points out that even a Jewish child is innately aware of this issue. When the Jewish child is described returning home from school and separating meat from milk, the message is that this concept is an essential and intrinsic part of every Jew. We must deal with constant tug-of-war between our *neshama* and our body. We must battle our animal side. But from a young age, we have the tools to succeed. Innately within us we know to use our intellect and keep our “meat” separate from our “milk”.

The mitzvah of *Bikkurim* also touches upon this theme. The bringing of the first crops to the Beis Hamikdash is a gesture exhibiting our uniquely human side. We do not rush to ease our hunger and consume the first fruits of the crop. Unlike an animal, that after killing its prey will quickly devour all that it needs, immediately filling its stomach and its desire for survival, we exhibit patience, put them aside, and fulfill Hashem’s will.

Shavuos, the day of receiving Hashem’s Torah, is the time to focus on what it means to be a human being. Are we just sophisticated vegetables and animals or do we have a unique nature and mission? The Torah teaches us how to move beyond our vegetative and animalistic elements, act purely human, and thereby connect to the divine. As we enjoy our cheesecake this Shavuos (carefully keeping it away from our *fleishig* Yom Tov delicacies), may we all learn to appreciate Hashem’s Torah and let it elevate our existence!

Dedicated in memory of David Kramer z"l,
on his 10th Yahrzeit

by

Karen (Kramer) & Howie Schulman

Miriam Kramer & Rabbi Aaron Levy & Family

Miri and Rabbi Danny Kramer & Family

Adina and Rabbi Daniel Moses & Family

*Wishing the entire community
a Chag Sameach!*

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