



Ki Savo – I Have Not Forgotten

Rabbi Shmuel Silber

“When you have finished tithing all the tithes of your produce in the third year, the year of the tithe, you shall give [them] to the Levite, the stranger, the orphan, and the widow, so that they can eat to satiety in your cities. Then you shall say before the Lord, your God, ‘I have removed the holy [portion] from the house, and I have also given it to the Levite, the stranger, the orphan, and the widow, according to all Your commandment that You commanded me; I have not transgressed Your commandments, nor have I forgotten [them].’” (Devorim 26:12-13)

The Torah commands us to distribute various tithes to the *Kohanim*, *Leviim* and the poor. Different tithes apply throughout the 7-year agricultural cycle. In year three of this cycle, there is a process known as *vidui maaser* (confession of the tithes), during which the farmer “confesses” that he has properly distributed his tithes to the needy and tribe of Levi. There appears to be an extraneous phrase in this confession, “Nor have I forgotten.” What is the meaning of this statement? Is it not obvious the farmer has not forgotten? He just stated, “I have removed the holy portion from the house, I have given it to the Levite, the stranger...” What is the purpose of explicitly stating that he has not forgotten?

Rashi explains, “nor have I forgotten: to bless You [to recite the *beracha* (blessing) on the performance of the *mitzvah*] of separating tithes.” The great Kabbalist, Rav Yaakov Shaltiel, in his work titled *Emes L’Yaakov*, provides an incredible insight on this statement of Rashi. There are times when we are proficient in the automatic details of *Torah* and *mitzvos* yet fail to feel. We know what to do and how to do it, but lack excitement and passion. Our Judaic obligations offer us an opportunity to connect to the Divine and establish a meaningful relationship with God. But that relationship only occurs if we serve and perform with meaning and devotion. This dynamic is encapsulated in a *beracha*. The Talmud explains that in most situations, “*berachos eynan mi’akvos*,” failure to recite a blessing doesn’t compromise the validity or effectiveness of the *mitzvah*. If you blow the shofar and fail to make a *beracha* beforehand, you have still fulfilled the *mitzvah*. If you light your *menorah* and neglect to make a *beracha* beforehand, you have still fulfilled your obligation. If so, then what is the role of a *beracha*? It is a preparatory act to create a sense of excitement for what is about to occur. We make a *beracha* and say, *Baruch Ata Hashem*, God, you are the source of all blessing; *Elokeinu Melech HaOlam*, My God, the King of the Universe... With these words we are acknowledging that through this act we have the privilege of connection. With this act, we can establish a relationship with Hashem and connect to the infinite holiness of our Creator. This realization creates an intense passion and longing, and fundamentally transforms the act of the *mitzvah* from a mechanistic behavior to a service of devotion and excitement.

This is the deeper meaning of Rashi. The farmer says, “God, I have done all you have asked me, I separated and dispersed the tithes, I took care of Your children as You asked me to. I have adhered to all the details as You have commanded. But I have not forgotten. In the flurry of details and obligations, I haven’t forgotten what this *mitzvah* and all other *mitzvos* are really about – connection. I made my *berachos*, I have served You with excitement and passion. I have continuously recognized the privilege I have to forge a relationship with You through the performance of Your *mitzvos*. I have adhered to the details but have never forgotten to simultaneously stoke the spiritual fire of excitement.”

These are exciting and overwhelming days. As one year comes to a close and another is poised to begin we must introspect and examine our relationship with God. Too often we only look at this relationship through the lens of sin and salvation. This is important but is not the totality of our relationship. Many of us go through life and miss out on the awesome opportunity to have a truly meaningful and deep relationship with God. Our Judaism must be more than just doing good deeds and avoiding sin (again, very important), it must be about creating relationship, it must be about making *berachos* and infusing passion wherever we can. The first step in the process is a *beracha*. A *beracha* forces us to pause before we act and allows us the time to contemplate what we are about to do. If it is a *beracha* before the performance of a *mitzvah*, we can think about how this *mitzvah* affords us the opportunity to connect with God. If it is a *beracha* before eating, we can think about our relationships to the material world and if we are using our material wealth to bring us closer to God and our fellow man. The *beracha* provides us with the few moments of contemplation which then creates the opportunity for excitement and passion.

May we be privileged to make the farmer’s statement, “I have done all You have asked me”, and may we be privileged to always say, “nor have I forgotten.”