



BEIT MIDRASH ZICHRON DOV TORONTO TORAH

SUMMER EDITION | כי תבוא - KI TAVO

Vol. 17 Num. 35 (#692) · 16 Elul 5786 / August 29, 2026

Candle lighting: 7:41 pm  Havdallah: 8:48 pm (50 minutes after שקיעה)



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Historical Gratitude

Parshat Ki Tavo begins with one of the most beautiful ceremonies in the Torah. A farmer arrives in Yerushalayim carrying his first fruits, and declares: "הגדתי היום לה' אלקיך כי: 'באתי אל הארץ אשר נשבע ה' לאבותינו לתת לנו", I declare today that I have come to the land that Hashem swore to our fathers to give us. Rashi explains the purpose is: "שאינך כפוי טובה", to show that you are not ungrateful. The gratitude though is not merely for the fruit. It is gratitude for history.

The Rambam describes Mikra Bikkurim as the mitzvah to recount the goodness Hashem has done for us and how He saved us. The farmer begins with our forefathers, descends to Egypt, remembers slavery and redemption, and only then arrives at his own field. He is being taught that his private success is one chapter in a much larger story: Hashem made a promise, and generations later, he is living inside its fulfillment.

Rashi in a number of places in his peirush on Tanach, uses on the words "מבטיח ועושה". Hashem promises, and He does. This describes one of the deepest forms of emunah: learning to read Jewish history and recognize the long arc between Hashem's promise and fulfillment.

That is what David HaMelech did when he brought the Aron to Yerushalayim. Divrei HaYamim tells us that on that day David established the song of "Hodu LaHashem." And what does the song say? "זכרו לעולם", remember His covenant forever; the covenant with Avraham, the oath to Yitzchak, and the promise "to you I will give the Land of Canaan."

Hodu is not simply gratitude for one good day. It is the ability to look across centuries and say: He promised, and He did.

That is also our calling as a people. Yeshayahu says, "אתם עדי נאום ה'" You are My witnesses." The Sifrei makes the astonishing statement: "כשאתם עדי אני", when you are My witnesses, I am God. Our task is to bear witness to Hashem's presence in the world, including through what we have seen Him do in history.

And yet seeing is not always easy.

We say every day, "תחזינה עינינו בשוכר לציון", may our eyes behold Your return to Zion. Why do we pray for our eyes? Perhaps because Hashem can be returning us to Zion while our eyes remain fixed on everything that is still wrong.

There are wars and tragedies, political battles and internal divisions, disappointments and failures. There is much to fix. But Bikkurim teaches that gratitude does not require pretending everything is perfect. Jews brought Bikkurim through generations that knew war, instability and national struggle. Yet the farmer still stood in the Mikdash and declared: I am living in the land Hashem promised us.

Rabbeinu Yehudah ben Yakar, the Ramban's rebbe, explains that the bracha of Shehechiyanu, I learned from Bikkurim. The Bracha that we say at every moment of joy through our lives, as thanking Hashem that "I merited to reach this moment stems from us recognizing Hashem's hand in History. As the farmer thanks Hashem that he has lived to reach the moment when he can say, I have come to the Land.

For nearly two thousand years, Jews faced Yerushalayim three times a day and prayed for kibbutz galuyot. Every Pesach and every Yom Kippur ended with "לשנה הבאה בירושלים."

Rabbi Sinai Adler, the former Chief Rabbi of Ashdod, survived Auschwitz and the death march to Mauthausen. He describes how, on Pesach in Mauthausen, he and another young man walked together and tried to reconstruct the Haggadah from memory. In the midst of starvation, exhaustion, and unimaginable suffering, they pieced together whatever passages they could remember. And when they reached the end, they said the words Jews had said for generations: L'shanah haba'ah b'Yerushalayim, next year in Jerusalem.

In that moment, those words must have seemed almost impossible to believe. Jerusalem was not simply far away; it seemed unimaginable. And yet he later wrote: "The prayer was answered. The very next year, I sat at the Seder in Jerusalem"

That story should shake us. We are living in a generation that our ancestors prayed for in circumstances in which fulfillment seemed almost inconceivable.

We still face wars, pain, division, and enormous challenges. There is much that remains broken and much that we are responsible to build. But that cannot blind us to what has already happened.

Parshat Ki Tavo asks us to bring our Bikkurim to stop, look at Jewish history, and recognize the promise within the reality before us: Hashem promised. Hashem has fulfilled. We have seen it. And we thank Him.



Can a Shul Refuse to Be Motzi Someone Who Hasn't Paid Membership?

Question: Our shul has a recurring problem: some members do not pay their required membership dues. One suggestion was that before shofar blowing on Rosh Hashanah, the *baal toke'a* should announce that, at the instruction of the shul leadership, he does not intend to be *motzi* anyone who has not paid his dues. Is such a policy halachically effective?

Answer: Without discussing whether this is a wise tactic for encouraging payment, let us first ask a more basic question: **Does it even work halachically?**

For one person to be *motzi* another through *tekias shofar*, both parties require *kavannah*. The listener must intend to fulfill his obligation through the *baal toke'a*, and the *baal toke'a* must intend to be *motzi* the listener. If either lacks the necessary intention, the listener is not *yotzei*.

However, the **Rema (O.C. 581:1)** rules regarding the Rosh Hashanah *chazzan* that if he intends not to be *motzi* his enemy, even his friends are not *yotzei* through him.

At first glance, this suggests that a *baal toke'a* cannot simply exclude someone. But perhaps this

applies only when the exclusion stems from personal animosity?

Not necessarily. Rav Yosef Chaim Sonnenfeld discusses a *chazzan* who intends not to be *motzi* sinners. He explains that such an intention may work regarding women, but not men, since a Jewish man is a *bar chiyuva*—personally obligated in the mitzvah. This would seem to indicate that even when there is a legitimate reason to exclude someone, the intention may be ineffective. Seemingly, the same should apply to unpaid membership dues.

But perhaps our case is different. Why does excluding one person prevent the *chazzan* from being *motzi* everyone else?

The **Shevet HaLevi** explains that the role of a *shaliach tzibbur* is based on *shlichus*. If the *chazzan* excludes certain people, he may be violating the terms of his appointment. Once his *shlichus* is compromised, it may become invalid for the entire congregation.

The **Chavos Yair**, however, discusses a fascinatingly similar case. A community hired

a *baal toke'a*, but some members refused to contribute toward his fee. Those who paid instructed him to intend specifically to be *motzi* them. The Chavos Yair rules that this can work: since the paying members hired and appointed him, they may stipulate the terms of his *shlichus*.

Based on this, there may indeed be room to argue that if a shul hires a *baal toke'a* and makes payment of dues a condition for inclusion in his *shlichus*, that condition could have halachic validity.

But before anyone gets too excited and starts printing the Rosh Hashanah announcement, this requires consultation with a qualified moreh hora'ah. The issue is complex, and one cannot assume that the Chavos Yair applies directly to our case.

And there is one final question: **Even if it works halachically, is it a good idea?** Perhaps it will encourage people to pay. But perhaps it will accomplish the opposite and push them further away.

Sometimes the question is not only “Can we do this?” but also “Should we?”



Does Redemption Depend on Repentance?

Based on Kima Kima by Rav Chaim Drukman

The Gemara raises a fundamental question about the conditions for redemption.

Rav states:
“All the end dates have passed, and the matter depends only on repentance and good deeds.” (Sanhedrin 97b)

Rashi explains this bluntly. If Israel repents, redemption will come. If not, it will not come. Redemption, according to this view, is conditional.

Shmuel disagrees:
“It is enough for the mourner to remain in his mourning.” (Sanhedrin 97b)

Rashi offers two interpretations of who the mourner is. Either HaKadosh Barukh Hu, who will not allow the mourning of exile to extend forever, or Israel, whose suffering in exile is already sufficient. In both readings, Shmuel's conclusion is the same. Redemption will arrive even without repentance.

This disagreement already appears earlier between the Tannaim.

Rabbi Eliezer says:

“If Israel repents, they are redeemed. If not, they are not redeemed.”

Rabbi Yehoshua responds:

“And if they do not repent, they will not be redeemed? Rather, HaKadosh Barukh Hu appoints for them a king whose decrees are as harsh as Haman, and Israel repents, and He returns them to the proper path.” (Sanhedrin 97b)

At first glance, Rabbi Yehoshua seems to agree with Rabbi Eliezer. Repentance still precedes redemption. The only difference is how that repentance comes about. If so, what is the actual dispute.

The Maharsha explains that Rabbi Eliezer speaks of repentance that emerges willingly, while Rabbi Yehoshua speaks of repentance that comes through compulsion. Yet this distinction is difficult. Repentance always requires choice. Even under pressure, a person still decides whether to change.

This difficulty forces a reassessment of the debate. Perhaps the dispute is not about motivation at all. Perhaps it is about what kind of repentance the Gemara is describing.