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In Memory of Rabbi Abraham Leibtag
Shiurim in Chumash & Navi by Menachem Leibtag

PARSHAT KI TAVO

Saying 'thank-you': Ask any mother - it's not enough to 'think' it - a child has to **say** it. For some reason, a verbal declaration, be it of gratitude or regret, is of paramount importance not only for the listener, but - even more so - for the person who utters it.

In Parshat Ki Tavo, we find two such examples of obligatory declarations, precisely where the main speech of Sefer Devarim reaches its conclusion. In this week's shiur, as we study the concluding section of the 'main speech,' we attempt to explain why.

INTRODUCTION

As usual, we must begin our shiur with a quick review of the three basic components of the main speech in Sefer Devarim:

- * Introduction - the events at Ma'amad Har Sinai (chap. 5)
- * The **mitzva** section - (chapters 6-11)
- * The **chukim** u-mishpatim section - (chapters 12-26)

Our last several shiurim have focused on the mitzvot in the **chukim** u-mishpatim section, which began in Parshat Re'eh with the commandment to establish the National Center at **ha-makom asher yivchar Hashem**, then continued in Parshat Shoftim with mitzvot relating to national leadership and waging war, and concluded with a wide variety of civil laws ('mitzvot bein adam le-chavero') in Parshat Ki Tetzeh.

Now, in Parshat Ki Tavo, we find:

- A) Two final mitzvot, which conclude the **chukim & mishpatim** section;
- B) Moshe Rabbeinu's concluding remarks (26:16-19);
- C) A special ceremony to take place on Har Eival (chapter 27);
- D) The "tochacha" - a lengthy rebuke (in chapter 28).

Off this backdrop, we will discuss these topics in three "mini-shiurim" into which our shiur will be divided.

PART I - THE TWO LAST MITZVOT OF THE MAIN SPEECH

Review the opening section of Parshat Ki Tavo (26:1-15), noting how it contains two mitzvot:

1) MIKRA BIKKURIM (26:1-11)

A special declaration made upon the presentation of one's first fruits.

2) VIDDUI MA'ASER (26:12-15)

A special declaration recited once every three years, when 'ma'aser sheni' [the second tithe] is given to the poor (rather than eating that tithe at the 'makom asher yivchar Hashem').

Then, review the next short 'parshia' (26:26-19), noting once again how it forms the concluding remarks of the 'main speech'.

[To verify this point, simply review the opening psukim of chapter 27, noting how they are written in third person narrative, and hence form the beginning of a new section.]

Based on this short analysis, it becomes quite clear that these two mitzvot were specially chosen to conclude the **chukim & mishpatim** section of the main speech of Sefer Devarim. In our shiur, we will attempt to explain why.

WHERE THEY 'REALLY' BELONG!

Before we discuss what is special about these two mitzvot, we must first take into consideration that both of them should have been recorded earlier in the speech, back in Parshat Re'eh. Let's explain why.

Recall how Parshat Re'eh discussed numerous mitzvot relating to "**ha-makom asher yivchar Hashem**" (note how that phrase appears over fifteen times in that Parsha and in the beginning of Parshat Shoftim, see 12:5,11,14,18,21,26; 14:23; 15:20;

16:2,6,7,11,15,16; and 17:8). Afterward, that phrase doesn't appear again until the mitzva of bikkurim at the end of the speech (see 26:1-2)!

Furthermore, back in Parshat Re'eh, we already found laws relating to bringing other produce to "ha-makom asher yivchar Hashem" (see 14:22-23). Hence, it certainly would have made more sense to record the laws of **bikkurim** back in Parshat Re'eh.

[In fact, if we compare this to the pattern established in Parshat Mishpatim (see Shmot 23:14-19, especially 23:19), then the mitzva of **mikra bikkurim** should have been recorded in Devarim chapter 16 (in Parshat Re'eh), together with (or immediately after) the laws of shalosh regalim (compare Devarim 16:9-12 with Shmot 23:14-19).]

Similarly, the laws of "**viddui ma'aser**" also should have been recorded in Parshat Re'eh, for the simple reason that it's where we find all the other laws pertaining to the three year cycle of "ma'aser sheni" (see 14:22-29).

Yet for some reason, Sefer Devarim prefers to 'uproot' these mitzvot from where they seem to 'belong' in Parshat Re'eh, and records them instead in Parshat Ki-tavo to form the finale of the entire speech.

MATCHING BOOKENDS

One could suggest that the relocation of these mitzvot yields a chiasmic structure for the entire chukim u-mishpatim section of the main speech. In other words, the mitzvot of **ha-makom asher yivchar Hashem** serve as 'bookends' for the entire **chukim u-mishpatim** section (chapters 12-26), as it both begins **and** ends with mitzvot relating to this theme.

[In a previous shiur, we offered a similar explanation for the structure of the earlier **mitzva** section of Moshe's main speech. We suggested that the parshiyot of **shma** and **ve-haya im sham'o'a** serve as 'bookends' for this section (i.e. chapters 6-11), thus emphasizing the section's overall theme, 'ahavat Hashem' (see shiur on Parshat Va-etchanan).]

Nonetheless, a more basic question remains: i.e. Why were specifically these two mitzvot - **mikra bikkurim** and **viddui ma'aser** - selected (over all the others) to form this closing 'bookend'?

To answer this question, we must show how both of these mitzvot relate to thanking God for the Land of Israel - the very land that has emerged as a primary theme at key points in the main speech.

To support this, let's begin by simply noting how both "mikra bikkurim" and "viddui maser" contain declarations of gratitude for the 'fertile land' granted by God to the nation of Israel:

1. MIKRA BIKKURIM

"You shall then recite: ...and God brought us to this place and gave us this **land**, a land flowing with milk and honey. Therefore, I now bring my first fruits of the **soil** which You have given me" (26:9-10).

2. VIDDUI MA'ASER

"When you set aside your **ma'aser**...you shall declare before Hashem: I have [fulfilled all my obligations]... Look down from heaven and bless Your people Israel and the **soil** You have given us, a **land** flowing with milk and honey, as **You swore to our fathers**" (26:12-15).

Note as well how both declarations thank God not only for the Land but also recall His covenant with the Avot [the forefathers], which included God's original promise of the Land to their offspring.

Even though this connection between the land and God's covenant is stated explicitly only in regard to "**viddui ma'aser**" (see quote above / 26:15), it is also alluded to in **mikra bikkurim**, albeit more subtly, as that proclamation reflects thanksgiving for God's fulfillment of his covenant at 'brit bein ha-btarim' - when the land was promised to Avraham's offspring (see Breishit 15:18 / also compare Breishit 15:13-16 w/ Devarim 26:5-8).

[See Further Iyun section for a more complete explanation.]

However, the most explicit connection between the laws of this speech (from chapter 5 thru 26) and the land of Israel is found in Moshe Rabeinu's introduction to these laws. Recall the beginning of his speech, as he re-told the story of how and when these laws were first given to him by God. In that intro Moshe stated explicitly:

"And **these** are the **mitzva, chukim** u-mishpatim that God has commanded me to impart to you, to be **observed in the land** that you are about to enter and conquer..." (6:1).
[See also 5:28 and our introductory shiur to Sefer Devarim.]

In other words, the primary purpose of the main speech was to teach Bnei Yisrael the various laws which they must keep and follow as they conquer the land and establish their nation.

Based on these observations, one could suggest that Sefer Devarim intentionally 'saved' these two 'declarations' for the conclusion of the main speech - because both of these mitzvot relate to the need for Am Yisrael to recognize **why** God has given them the land of Israel. Hence, it becomes most appropriate that the final mitzvot of this speech include expressions of gratitude to God for the **land** He has given us.

In this sense, one could understand the mitzva of **mikra bikkurim** in a slightly different light. Instead of viewing this mitzva as a yearly thanksgiving to God for our fruits, it should be viewed instead as a yearly thanksgiving to God for the Land of Israel. In other words, the purpose of "mikra bikkurim" is first and foremost to thank God for the Land and our covenant with Him; while bringing a sampling of our first fruits should be viewed as a 'token of our appreciation'! [To verify this, carefully read 26:3-8 once again.]

[This may also explain why we quote **mikra bikkurim** in the **Haggada** on Pesach as part of the mitzva of retelling the story of Yetziat Mitzrayim and thanking God for His fulfillment of brit bein ha-btarim. Whereas the primary purpose of this mitzva is to thank God for fulfilling His covenant, this declaration is appropriate as well for **maggid**, in which we thank God for His fulfillment of brit bein ha-btarim. (See Shmot 13:8 and compare with Devarim 26:3, noting the use of '**ve-higgadeti**' in both contexts!)]

Recalling God's covenant with the Avot serves another purpose, as well. The farmer not only thanks God for fulfilling His promise to our forefathers, but also reminds himself of the reason **why** God gave us the land - to become a great nation to represent Him before the eyes of the nations of the world. [See Breishit 12:1-3 and our shiur on Parshat Lech Lecha.]

As such, these declarations are significant in that they emphasize the reason for keeping **all** the mitzvot of the main speech in Sefer Devarim - that Bnei Yisrael become an 'am kadosh' (a holy nation), a model for all nations to follow. [See Devarim 4:5-8.]

PART II / THE FINALE - MOSHE'S CONCLUDING REMARKS

This same theme continues in Moshe Rabeinu's concluding remarks of the main speech (which follow these two mitzvot):

"On this day, God commands you to observe these **chukim** u-mishpatim... God has affirmed this day that you are His '**am segula**' (treasured nation) and He will set you high above all the nations, that you shall be, as He promised, a '**goy kadosh**' (a holy nation)..." (see 26:16-19)

Moshe concludes the main speech by reiterating the primary purpose behind keeping these mitzvot: that Am Yisrael becomes an **am kadosh**, a holy nation, worthy of representing God.

BACK TO HAR SINAI

Moshe's concluding remarks also feature a striking parallel to God's original charge to Bnei Yisrael at Har Sinai. Recall that when Bnei Yisrael first arrive at Har Sinai, God summons Moshe to the mountain and proposes a special covenant with Bnei Yisrael:

"And now, if **you will listen to my voice and keep my covenant**, then you shall become for Me a '**segula**' amongst all the nations...and you shall be for Me a kingdom of priests and a **goy kadosh**..." (Shmot 19:5-6).

This proposal, which actually forms the prelude to the Ten Commandments, explains the central function of Matan Torah - that Am Yisrael will become a "**goy kadosh**" - a nation set aside [designated] to represent God.

Now, at the conclusion of the main speech - in which Moshe Rabeinu repeats those mitzvot which were **originally given at Har Sinai** (immediately after the dibrot - see our introductory shiur to Sefer Devarim) - this very same theme must be re-iterated:

"And God has affirmed this day that you are, as He promised you [at Har Sinai!], His **am segula** who shall **observe** all of His commandments, and that He will set you, in fame and renown and glory, high above all the nations that He has made; and that you shall be, as He promised [at Har Sinai!], a **goy kadosh**..." (26:18-19).

Moshe's concluding remarks thus appropriately close his presentation of the mitzvot that will facilitate Bnei Yisrael's development into a **am segula** and an **am kadosh**, just as He had originally promised at Har Sinai!

THE PROPER BALANCE

Moshe's concluding remarks also beautifully tie together the two sections of the main speech. Recall that the **mitzva** section, whose primary topic is ahavat Hashem, opened with the commandment to love God - 'be-chol levavcha u-vechol nafshecha' - with all your heart and soul. Now, at the conclusion of the **chukim** u-mishpatim section, Moshe explains how these two sections relate to one other:

"The Lord your God commands you this day to keep these **chukim** u-mishpatim; observe them faithfully - 'be-chol levavcha u-vechol nafshecha' - with all your heart and with all your soul..." (26:16).

In other words, the numerous specific mitzvot recorded in the **chukim** u-mishpatim section must be observed with the proper attitude, as explained in the **mitzva** section. Thus, Moshe's speech has come full circle. The general values of faith and love of God outlined in the **mitzva** section must combine with the practical, day-to-day details and guidelines of the **chukim** u-mishpatim section, to form a mode of behavior capable of producing God's special nation in His special land.

PART III - THE COVENANT AT ARVOT MO'AV AND HAR EIVAL

The thematic and textual parallel to Ma'amad Har Sinai at the conclusion of the main speech continues in the next parshia as well:

"Moshe and the elders charged the people, saying: Observe everything that I command you today... for when you cross the Jordan, you must erect large stones and coat them with plaster [in order that] you shall write on them all the words of this Torah [the mitzvot of Sefer Devarim]... erect these stones on Har Eival... And you shall build there a **mizbeiach**... (note parallel to Shmot 20:22), and you shall offer upon it **olot** and **shlamim**..." (Devarim 27:1-8).

You might recall that an almost identical ceremony was conducted some forty years earlier, at Ma'amad Har Sinai, immediately after Moshe taught Bnei Yisrael the laws he was taught after the Ten Commandments:

"And Moshe came [down from Har Sinai] and told the people all of God's commandments and the **mishpatim**... Moshe then wrote down all of God's commandments. Then, he woke up early in the morning and built a **mizbeiach** at the foot of the mountain and erected twelve large stones... and they offered **olot** and **shlamim**..." (Shmot 24:3-8).

Furthermore, the requirement that a tochacha be read as part of the ceremony on Har Eival (see Devarim 27:11-28:69) parallels the tochacha delivered at Har Sinai (Vayikra 26:3-46, see also 25:1).

Thus, this ceremony on Har Eival, which consists of the writing and teaching of the mitzvot of Sefer Devarim, the construction of a **mizbeiach** and offering of **olot** and **shlamim**, parallels the covenantal ceremony at Ma'amad Har Sinai, when Bnei Yisrael proclaimed 'na'aseh ve-nishma' (see Shmot 24:3-11).

The reason behind this parallel is simple. As this generation (which stands on the brink of entry into the Land to fulfill these mitzvot) was not present at the original ceremony, a **new** ceremony is required for the new generation to reaffirm their commitment to the covenant.

This ceremony will take place on Har Eival, where Bnei Yisrael will gather to 'relive' the experience of Har Sinai by studying the mitzvot of Sefer Devarim, which will guide them towards the establishment of their new nation.

TODAY

It is not often in our history that a generation is granted the opportunity to fulfill a destiny originally intended for an earlier generation. Aware of the immense potential latent in such an opportunity, Moshe encourages the new generation in the desert to rise to the challenge of establishing an **am kadosh** in the Promised Land, as God had originally planned for their parents.

Although this challenge by Moshe Rabbeinu to Am Yisrael is some three thousand years old, it takes on additional significance today, as our own generation has been granted the opportunity to fulfill this very same destiny, a privilege that had remained but a dream for so many years.

shabbat shalom,
menachem

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FOR FURTHER IYUN

A. Carefully compare the declaration in **mikra bikkurim** with God's covenant with Avraham Avinu at brit bein ha-btarim (Breishit 15), the original covenant with Avraham, which includes God's promise of the Land to his offspring.

Pay particular attention to Breishit 15:7-21 and relate these psukim to Devarim 1:7-11, Moshe's opening remarks in his introductory speech. Note the use of the word 'yerusha' and/or shoshon y.r.sh. in both contexts, and specifically 've-rishta' in 26:11!

Also, note the historical process described in Breishit 15:13-16 and how it relates to 26:5-8. Relate this as well to Shemot 6:2-8.

Finally, see the dispute among the mefarshim as to whom the introduction to mikra bikkurim - 'Arami oved avi' refers. See Rashi and the Haggada, as opposed to Ibn Ezra, Chizkuni and Seforno - these are the two most common interpretations. Then look at Rashbam's peirush (which appears as well in the commentary of Rabbenu Yosef Bechor Shor). Explain why Rashbam's explanation fits best into our reading of mikra bikkurim. If 'arami' does refer to Lavan, could we still associate 'arami oved avi' with brit bein ha-btarim? Compare Breishit 15:13 and 31:40-42. See also 'Da'at Mikra' on Breishit 15:13 and the Netziv's peirush ('He'amek Davar') on Dvarim 26:5.

B. Regarding the importance of a verbal declaration, see Rashbam on 26:13 and Sefer Hachinuch on both mikra bikkurim and viddui ma'aser.

C. In terms of the connection between viddui ma'aser and the bet hamikdash: Several Rishonim maintain that viddui ma'aser must take place in the bet hamikdash - see Sefer Hachinuch, Tosfot Sota 33a 'birkat' and Ra'avad Hilchot Ma'aser Sheni 11:4. How would the other Rishonim (Rambam and others) explain the clause 'lifnei Hashem Elokecha' in 26:13?

D. Many people have questioned why the declaration after distributing ma'aser is called viddui ma'aser - the "confession" of ma'aser. The expression viddui usually has to do with confession of wrongdoing. Here, the individual does just the opposite - he declares, "I have done everything You have commanded me." Why, then, do Chazal refer to this declaration as viddui? See Rashi and Metzudat David in Divrei Hayamim II 30:22 who translate the word 'mitvadim' as 'expressing gratitude'. (See the two versions of the Targum there, as well.) Relate this to viddui ma'aser and the above shiur.

D. How many stones are taken from the Yarden in Sefer Yehoshua (4:1-10)? What is done with these stones?

How does this relate to Shmot 24:3-10?

What other parallels exist between Sefer Yehoshua and the generation of Yetziat Mitzrayim?

As you answer this question, pay particular attention to chapters 3 & 5 in Sefer Yehoshua!

See Yehoshua 8:30-35. Is this the fulfillment of the mitzva in Devarim 27:1-11? Why is this mitzva performed only after the battle against Ha-Ai? [Or is it? Three opinions exist as to when this ceremony actually took place. See Sota 36a (quoting the Tosefta) that Bnei Yisrael performed this ceremony immediately upon crossing the Yarden, as opposed to Rabbi Yishmael's view in Yerushalmi Sota 7:3, that this occurred only after the 14 years of 'kibbush ve-chiluk' (conquest and settlement). In 'pshat,' of course, this ceremony occurred after the war with Ha-Ai, and this is the shitta of Abarbanel and the Malbim.]

E. If the blessings and curses of Har Grizim and Har Eival serve as a reenactment of Ma'amad Har Sinai, then we would perhaps expect the blessings / curses to correspond to the Ten Commandments.

While some of them are more obvious than others, it might just work. Let's give it a try:

- 1) "Cursed be anyone who makes a sculptured or molten image..." A clear parallel to the first two dibrot ('Anochi' and 'lo yihyeh lecha').
- 2) "Cursed be he who insults his father or mother" - honoring parents.
- 3) "Cursed be he who moves his fellow countryman's landmark" - stealing (see Rashi here).
- 4) "Cursed be he who misdirects a blind person on his way" - a bit more tricky. Rashi explains this as referring to intentionally misleading someone with bad advice, which seems to relate to Rashi's interpretation of 'lifnei iver' - see Vayikra 19:14. There, Rashi explains the case as involving one who persuades another to sell property in order to acquire it himself. If so, then this curse may correspond to 'lo tachmod', excessive desire for the property of others.
- 5) "Cursed be he who subverts the rights of the stranger, the orphan and the widow." Take a careful look at the Torah's presentation of the mitzva of Shabbat in Shmot 23:12, and consider the role played by Yetziat Mitzrayim as a basis for this mitzva (Dvarim 5:15) and Seforno there in Shmot and in Dvarim 5:12. See if this curse could thus correspond to at least one element of the fourth commandment - Shabbat.
- 6) "Cursed be he who lies with his father's wife... who lies with any animal... who lies with his sister... who lies with his mother-in-law..." - 'lo tin'af.
- 7) "Cursed be he who strikes down his fellow countryman in secret" - 'lo tirtzach'.
- 8) "Cursed be he who accepts a bribe" - 'lo ta'aneh be-re'acha' (dishonesty in the courtroom).
- 9) "Cursed be he who will not uphold the terms of this Torah..." See Rashi's comment that this curse constitutes an oath to keep the Torah, perhaps corresponding to 'lo tisa'.

F. The ceremony at Har Grizim & Har Eival may have served another purpose, beyond the reenactment of Ma'amad Har Sinai. Note the geographic location of these mountains as described in Parshat Re'eh (Dvarim 11:30) and compare closely with Breishit 12:6. Now see Rashi there in Breishit, as well as the next pasuk (12:7 - note especially the mizbeiach!!). Explain why this parallel takes on particular significance according to the view of the Gemara in Sota cited above (in B). [See also Da'at Mikra on Yehoshua, introduction to 8:30-35.] Is this necessarily a different explanation from the one presented in the shiur?

G. A note regarding methodology: Throughout our series on Parshat Ha'shavua, we have seen numerous examples of how a specific parsha can be better understood by studying not only its **content** but also its **location** within the framework of an entire Sefer. Use the above shiur on Parshat Ki Tavo to support this approach.