



KI TAVO

Gratitude in Two Acts

The Immediate Thank You and the Thoughtful Follow-Up

PARSHAH OVERVIEW

Ki Tavo

Moses instructs the people of Israel: When you enter the Land that G-d is giving to you as your eternal heritage, and you settle it and cultivate it, bring the first-ripened fruits (*bikurim*) of your orchard to the Holy Temple, and declare your gratitude for all that G-d has done for you.

Our *parshah* also includes the laws of the tithes given to the Levites and to the poor, and detailed instructions on how to proclaim the blessings and the curses on Mount Gerizim and Mount Ebal—as discussed in the beginning of the *parshah* of *Re'eh*. Moses

reminds the people that they are G-d's chosen people, and that they, in turn, have chosen G-d.

The latter part of *Ki Tavo* consists of the *tochachah* ("rebuke"). After listing the blessings with which G-d will reward the people when they follow the laws of the Torah, Moses gives a long, harsh account of the bad things—illness, famine, poverty, and exile—that shall befall them if they abandon G-d's commandments.

Moses concludes by telling the people that only today, forty years after their birth as a people, have they attained "a heart to know, eyes to see, and ears to hear."



Saying “thank you”
has become so routine
that it often feels
automatic and empty.

TEXT 1

Yeo Boon Ping,
“What’s Wrong with
Saying ‘Thank You’
and Not Meaning It?”
www.ricemedia.co

Everything started [at the FairPrice supermarket] when I heard a seductive voice mewling at me, “Thank you. Please remember to take all your purchases.” . . . It was the machine speaking to me. And in that moment, I realized the emptiness of the phrase “thank you.”

If we, as a society, have gone to the extent of programming machines to thank us—and if we are equally nonchalant as to whether it’s a robot or a human doing so—it suggests that our motivation behind uttering “thank you” is more a social obligation than a genuine feeling of gratitude. . . .

Like all rituals, its meaning is eroded each time we carry it out without understanding the processes underpinning it. “Thank you” becomes a hollow phrase, devoid of meaning.

That is not to say that we should stop thanking service staff, our friends, or anyone who renders us help. Feeling and saying something are not mutually exclusive gestures. We can say “thank you,” mean it, and feel grateful simultaneously.

If we’re being honest with ourselves, however, most of us don’t synthesize all three. It’s just more convenient not to think about what we mean when we say “thank you”—we don’t have time to feel emotions anymore. I certainly am guilty of firing off out of a sense of obligation more than a feeling of gratitude.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

How do you say thank you? Is it different from how you perceive the “thank you” of others?

Upon entering the Land, the Jewish people were required to bring many agricultural offerings. The first ripe fruits, called *bikurim*, were brought to the Temple as thanks for the Land's bounty.



TEXT 2

Deuteronomy
26:1-3, 10

א. וְהָיָה כִּי תָבוֹא אֶל הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ נָתַן לְךָ נַחֲלָה וּירְשָׁתָהּ וַיֵּשְׁבָתָּ בָּהּ.

ב. וְלָקַחְתָּ מֵרֵאשִׁית כָּל פְּרִי הָאֲדָמָה אֲשֶׁר תָּבִיא מֵאֶרֶץ אֲשֶׁר ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ נָתַן לְךָ וְשָׂמָתָּ בַטֶּנֶא, וְהֵלַכְתָּ אֶל הַמָּקוֹם אֲשֶׁר יִבְחַר ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ לְשֹׁכֵן שְׁמוֹ שָׁם.

ג. וּבָאתָ אֶל הַכֹּהֵן אֲשֶׁר יִהְיֶה בַיָּמִים הֵם, וְאָמַרְתָּ אֵלָיו, הַגִּדְתִּי הַיּוֹם לַה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ כִּי בָאתִי אֶל הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר נִשְׁבַּע ה' לַאֲבֹתֵינוּ לָתֶת לָנוּ . . .

י. וְעַתָּה הִנֵּה הֵבֵאתִי אֶת רֵאשִׁית פְּרִי הָאֲדָמָה אֲשֶׁר נָתַתָּה לִּי ה', וְהִנֵּחְתָּו לִפְנֵי ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ וְהִשְׁתַּחֲוִיתָ לִפְנֵי ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ.

1. And it will be, when you enter the Land your G-d gives you for an inheritance, and you possess it and settle in it,

2. Take from the first of all the fruit of the ground, which you will bring from your Land that your G-d gives you. Put them in a basket and go to the place that your G-d will choose for His Name to dwell there.

3. Come to the priest who will serve in those days, and say to him, "I say today to your G-d, that I have come to the Land which G-d swore to our forefathers to give to us. . . ."

10. "And now, behold, I brought the first of the fruit from the ground which You, O G-d, gave me." Then, lay [the fruit] before your G-d, and prostrate yourself before Him.

TEXT 3A

Rashi, ad loc.

“וְהָיָה כִּי תָבוֹא . . . וְיִרְשָׁתָהּ וְיָשַׁבְתָּ בָּהּ”:

מִגִּיד שֶׁלֹּא נִתְחַיְבוּ בְּכַוּרִים עַד שֶׁכָּבְּשׁוּ אֶת הָאָרֶץ
וְחִלְקוּהָ.

“And it will be, when you enter the Land . . . and you possess it and settle in it”:

This tells us there was no obligation to bring the first-fruits offering until the Land was conquered and divided [among the tribes].



Rashi: The obligation to bring *bikurim* began only after the Jews settled the Land, which took fourteen years, so earlier fruits were not included.

TEXT 3B

Sifrei, ad loc.

”וְהָיָה כִּי תָבֹא אֶל הָאָרֶץ”:

אֵין ”וְהָיָה” אֶלָּא מִיָּד — כִּי תָבֹא אֶל הָאָרֶץ. עֲשֵׂה
מִצְוַת הָאֱמוּנָה בְּעֵנֶיךָ וְשִׁבְשֵׁבְכָהּ תִּכְנֹס לָאָרֶץ.

“And it will be, when you enter”:

The phrase “And it will be” connotes immediacy—as soon as you enter. Perform the *mitzvah* under discussion, and you will be rewarded with entering the Land.

Midrash: Any Jew who acquired land during those fourteen years had to bring a first-fruits offering immediately.



COMPETING CLAUSES

1. **The first clause** insists that the obligation begins when “you enter the Land”.
2. **The second clause** suggests that the obligation began fourteen years later, when “you possess and settle in it”.

If the Midrashic sages say the obligation begins on entry, how do they explain the second clause that delays it?

QUESTION FOR DISCUSSION

How would you reconcile the competing clauses in our passage?

TEXT 4A

Maimonides, *Mishneh
Torah*, Laws of the
First Fruits, 2:10

“בְּכוֹרֵי אֲדָמָתְךָ” (שְׁמוֹת כג, יט) - עַד
נִשְׁהִיּוּ כָּל הַגְּדוּלִין מֵאֲדָמָתְךָ.

“The first fruits of your land” (Exodus 23:19)
implies that all the fruit must grow from
your land.

TEXT 4B

Rabbi Chaim ben
Betzael, *Beer*
Mayim Chayim,
Deuteronomy 26:1

דְּקוּדָם שֶׁנֶחֱלְקוּ אֵין הִתְחִיד מִבִּיא בִּיכּוּרִים, שְׁאִינוּ
יָכוֹל לֹאמַר "הָאֲדָמָה אֲשֶׁר נָתַתָּ לִּי ה'" (דְּבָרִים
כו, י).

Before a family was allocated a plot, they could not bring the first-fruits offering because they could not justifiably proclaim that this fruit is from "the Land that You gave me, G-d" (Deuteronomy 26:10).



Some obligations exist from the start but can only be carried out later, like bringing *bikurim*, which required **ownership** of land.

TEXT 5

Rabbi Meir Leibush
Wisser, *Malbim*,
Deuteronomy 26:1

אֵין הַפִּירוּשׁ שְׁתִּיכָּךְ בְּבוֹאָם אֶל הָאָרֶץ נִתְחַיֵּבוּ
בְּבִיכּוּרִים, שֶׁהָרִי נֶאֱמַר "וַיִּרְשָׁתָהּ וַיֵּשְׁבֶתָ"
(דְּבָרִים כו, א), שֶׁהוּא אַחֲרֵי הַכְּבוּשׁ וְהַחִילּוּק.

The intention is not that the obligation to bring the first-fruits offering was activated immediately upon entering the Land. We know this because the Torah states, "and you possess and settle" (Deuteronomy 26:1), which only occurred after the Jews conquered the Land and divided it among the tribes.

According to both opinions, the obligation to bring *bikurim* was only binding once the Jews owned the Land.



QUESTION

If both views made no practical difference, what was the point of debating whether the obligation began immediately or after fourteen years?

TEXT 6A

Jerusalem Talmud,
Shevi'it 6:1

לְאַחַר אַרְבַּע עָשָׂרָה שָׁנָה שָׁבַע שְׁכִיבָשׁוּ וְשָׁבַע
שְׁחִילָקוּ . . . לֹא נִתְחַיְּבוּ עַד שְׁעָה שֶׁקָּנוּ כּוֹלָהּ.

The obligation was not activated until they acquired the entire Land . . . until after the fourteen years it took them to conquer and divide the Land among the tribes.

TEXT 6B

Ibid.

כִּי־יָנֹכְחוּ שְׂכָנֵיכֶם בְּתֹחֲבֵיבָתָם . . . רֹאשׁוֹן
רֹאשׁוֹן קוֹנֶה וּמִתְחַיֵּב.

The obligation was activated upon their entry into the Land. . . . As each family acquired a plot of land, they became obligated to bring the first-fruits offering.

וִירְשִׁתָּהּ וַיֵּשְׁבָהּ

viyrishta veyashavta

And you possess and settle

Talmud: after 14 years, once the entire land was settled.

Midrash: As each family received and settled their land, they began to bring *bikurim*.

Personal-based *mitzvah*:

Obligations that are binding,
regardless of location (Shabbat)



Land-based *mitzvah*:

Obligations that are only binding
when we are in Israel (*Shemitah*)



QUESTION FOR DISCUSSION

Do you think the first-fruits obligation was person-based, or land-based?

TEXT 7A

Tosafot, Talmud, Bava
Batra 81A

וְלִרְבִּי שְׁמִשּׁוֹן בֶּן אַבְרָהָם נִרְאָה, דִּלָּא חֲשִׁיבִי בְּכוּרִים
מִצְוָה תְּלוּיָה בְּאֶרֶץ . . . אֲבָל בְּכוּרִים וְנֵדְאֵי חוּבַת
הַגּוֹף . . . שְׁאִין הַחַיּוּב תְּלוּי בִּפְּיֻרוֹת אֱלָא בְּאָדָם.

It is the opinion of Rabbi Samson, son of Avraham [of
Sens], that the first-fruits offering is not considered a land-
based mitzvah: . . . it is undoubtedly a person-based
obligation. . . . The obligation does not rest upon the fruit;
it rests upon the person.

TEXT 7B

Tosafot, ibid.

וְאֵף עַל גַּב דְּאֵם אֵין לוֹ אֵינוֹ חֵיִיב לְקַנּוֹת, מִכָּל מָקוֹם, חוֹבַת
הַגּוֹף נִינהוּ.

כְּמוֹ חוֹבַת צִיצִית, דְּאֵף עַל גַּב דְּאֵין חֵיִיב לְקַנּוֹת טְלִית כְּשֶׁאֵין לוֹ,
חֲשִׁיב חוֹבַת הַגּוֹף.

The obligation of the first fruits offering is on the person [not the land], even though those who don't own land are not required to purchase land to discharge their obligation.

It is no different from the obligation to wear fringes on four-cornered garments. The obligation is on the person [not the garment] even though those who don't own a four-cornered garment are not required to purchase one to discharge their obligation.



Although *bikurim* is usually considered a land-based *mitzvah*, since it applies only to Jewish land in Israel, it can also be seen as a personal obligation.

- If *bikurim* is **land-based**, the obligation began only after the entire Land was settled.
- If *bikurim* is **person-based**, each family became obligated once they settled their own land.





Bikurim teaches that true gratitude begins with

1. appreciating the Giver, and
2. appreciating the gift itself

Both views highlight this.

TEXT 8

Rabbi Nissan Mindel,
My Prayer (Brooklyn,
N.Y.: Kehot
Publication Society,
1972), p. 17

"I give thanks unto You, O living and eternal King, for having restored within me my soul, with mercy; great is Your trust."

The first thing we become aware of when we awake from our sleep in the morning is that we are awake and alive. When we went to bed the night before, we were tired and exhausted, "dead-tired"; we wake up refreshed, in both body and soul, as if we were reborn again. It is only right that we should thank G-d for it.



Each morning, we say Modeh Ani, thanking G-d first for life, then for His kindness behind it, expressing gratitude in two steps.

TEXT 9

The Rebbe, Rabbi
Menachem Mendel
Schneerson,
Likutei Sichos 34, p. 151

ההודאה הראשונה שהאדם מקיימה, אומר תיכף
כשניעור משנתו, לא באה על ידי התבוננות
ומסקנא שכלית בגודל ועוצם הטובה שנעשה עמו
בהחזרת נשמתו, שהרי אף זה עתה מיד נתעורר
משינתו . . . ואינו שייך צדיין להתבוננות שכלית.

אלא הודאה זו היא בעיקר תוצאה מהאמונה
הפשוטה הנטועה בלב כל ישראל. שפאמונתו
הטהורה הוא מכיר דזה שהוא ניעור משנתו בכל
יום, זהו מפני שהקדוש ברוך הוא בעצמו מחזיר
לו נשמתו.

מה שאין כן ההודאה בעת התפלה באה על ידי
התבוננות שכלית כו', ככל עניני התעוררות בעת
התפלה הבאים על ידי התבוננות. כפסק המנשה
והשולחן ערוך שלפני התפלה חייב אדם להתבונן
ויתשוב מרוממות האל-ליתברך ובשפלות האדם.
וכן עניני התבוננות כו' בעת התפלה, שכתוצאה
מזה הרי הוא מודה לה'.

The first gratitude that we express upon waking
doesn't result from cognitively examining G-d's
incredible kindness in returning our souls to us in the
morning. The decision to thank G-d is not a mental
process. We literally just woke up . . . and are not yet
capable of deep thought.

Rather, this thank you is triggered by the pure faith
implanted in every Jewish heart. We recognize, purely
on faith, that we wake up each morning only because
G-d hand-delivered our soul to us.

The gratitude we offer during prayer [unlike the
gratitude expressed upon waking] results from
mental processing. It is one of many emotions we
deliberately trigger during prayer through cognitive
reflection, as directed by the Talmud and the
Shulchan Aruch, to meditate before prayer on G-d's
exaltedness and our lowliness. There are similar
meditations during prayer that move us to thank G-d.

Later in prayer, we express gratitude again, reflecting on the meaning and impact of the gift of life.



MORNING

- We thank G-d as soon as we wake up, straight from the heart.
- This thank you is natural and sincere, before we even start thinking.
- It's like bringing *bikurim* right away when entering Israel.

LATER

- We think about our blessings and what they mean for us.
- This helps us understand the full value of what we've been given.
- It's like bringing *bikurim* after the Land is fully settled.



Appreciation should never be routine or assumed: it should reflect a real awareness that someone chose to care and act.

Thank them in the moment, then again after you've reflected on their kindness.

KEY POINTS

1. The Jewish attitude is that gratitude must be sincere, from the heart.
2. The first thank you should be spontaneous and immediate with little thought. Initially, the less we think about our gratitude for another's kindness, the more authentic and natural it will be.
3. However, it is also important to process all the ways a favor might benefit us so we can understand its magnitude and thank more fully.
4. Thus, it is appropriate to express gratitude twice: The first thank you should be spontaneous, immediate, and about being touched. The second thank you is more deliberate and about the gift.
5. The second thank you is also more holistic and pervasive because the more we experience gratitude, the more it saturates our minds and hearts.

