



LESSON
1

For the Sake of Bikkurim

1 Tishrei

1 Nissan

בְּרֵאשִׁית – *In the beginning:*

[the world was created] for the sake of [the mitzvah of] bikkurim, of which it is written,¹ רֵאשִׁית בְּכוּרֵי אֲדָמָתְךָ, The earliest of the first fruits.²

Bikkurim are the first ripened fruits of the Seven Species with which Eretz Yisrael is especially blessed. The Torah commands that each year during the Temple era the farmers of the Land should bring their *bikkurim* to the *Beis HaMikdash* and offer praise to Hashem for His abundant kindness.³

How does this mitzvah serve as the purpose of Creation?

Alshich explains that the essence of the mitzvah of *bikkurim* is *hakaras hatov*, expressing gratitude, to Hashem. *Hakaras hatov* is fundamental to our *emunah* (faith) and observance of mitzvos. That is why the mitzvah of *bikkurim* was carried out with great fanfare⁴ and the farmer made a public declaration of thanks to Hashem.

In discussing the path towards fear and love of Hashem, Rambam writes:

When a person focuses on Hashem's wondrous deeds and creations and recognizes His infinite and unparalleled wisdom, he will immediately become filled with love and praise of Hashem, and he will desire to know Him, as Dovid HaMelech says,⁵ 'My soul thirsts for G-d, for the living G-d.'⁶

The universe, the flow of Jewish history, and our daily lives are filled with Hashem's kindness. When one contemplates His kindness, he becomes filled with love for and gratitude to Hashem and strengthens his resolve to faithfully serve Him.

1. *Shemos* 34:26.

2. *Bereishis Rabbah* 1:1.

3. See *Devarim* 26:1-11.

4. *Mishnah Bikkurim* ch. 3.

5. *Tehillim* 42:3.

6. *Hilchos Yesodei HaTorah* 2:2.

The first of the Ten Commandments begins, “*I am Hashem, your G-d, Who has taken you out of the land of Egypt.*”⁷ The Midrash states:

*Hashem said to the Jewish people, “I am your G-d...” Why did He add, “...Who took you out of Egypt”? He was saying to them: “Be careful not to be ungrateful, for an ingrate cannot accept My sovereignty.”*⁸

An ingrate who does not acknowledge the miracles of the Exodus cannot truly accept upon himself עול מלכות שמים, *the yoke of the Kingdom of Heaven*. Conversely, the more one grows in his level of *hakaras hatov*, the more he grows in fulfilling Hashem’s will.



“*Baruch Hashem?*”

The Manchester Rosh Yeshivah, Rabbi Yehudah Zev Segal, never missed an opportunity to express *hakaras hatov*. When, on an overcast day, the clouds parted to allow the sun to shine, he lifted his eyes heavenward and said with a smile, “*The Ribono shel Olam* has brought out the sun for us.”

When a woman informed the Rosh Yeshivah that “*Baruch Hashem*” she was expecting a child, he responded, “*Baruch Hashem? Chasdei Hashem (the kindnesses of Hashem)!* One has no idea how much gratitude one must feel for being able to have a child, and for the child being born healthy.”⁹

7. *Shemos* 20:2.

8. *Mishnas R’ Eliezer*, p. 33.

9. *The Manchester Rosh Yeshivah — The Life and Ideals of HaGaon Rabbi Yehudah Zev Segal* (ArtScroll/Mesorah).

1 Tishrei — May today’s learning be a *zechus* for health and *nachas*
Lovingly dedicated in gratitude to Bracha Shoop

1 Nissan — Reuben Kondov ע"ה בן שרה ז"ל בן שרה ע"ה
Dedicated in loving memory by his sons and grandchildren

LESSON 2

The Wonders of Creation

2 Tishrei

2 Nissan

The combination of beauty and wisdom in the universe defies description and inspires us to sing our Creator's praises. *Let them praise the Name of Hashem, for He commanded and they were created ...*¹ Perhaps the one most qualified to appreciate the beauty in this world is an artist.

R' Motta Brim of Jerusalem is an outstanding professional artist. In his words:

If I walk outside and see a tree with its branches reaching upward, I see a tree "davening." If I paint this image in a way that helps others notice that a tree looks like it is praising Hashem, perhaps the observer will be inspired to praise Hashem with a fuller heart.

When an artist sees more deeply the connection between heaven and earth, then the artist has a tafkid (purpose), a responsibility to help others to see this unity in creation. ... There are so many subtleties of beauty, color, and form around us that are often taken completely for granted. By enhancing this sensitivity and awakening a sense of awe in regard to the daily miracles that surround us, a person can ultimately forge a closer, more personal relationship with Hashem.²



By appreciating the hidden miracles of nature, we draw closer to Hashem.

The Most Amazing Paintbrush

In a piece tracing her path to discovering the beauty and truth of Torah Judaism, Allison Josephs described an inspirational turning point in her life:

In my junior year in high school, my family took a trip to Hawaii. On a hike through a breathtaking tropical rain

1. *Tehillim* 148:5.

2. From a piece by Chava Dumas in *Hamodia's Inyan* magazine, 8 Elul 5773.

forest, we came upon some bamboo shoots whose bark was covered in green and gold vertical stripes.

“Did someone paint these on here?” I wondered aloud.

Everyone in my family had an opinion on the matter. ... When I looked up, I saw that the shoots towered over us fifty feet into the sky, with stripes all the way to the top.

“Wow,” I muttered to myself, “G-d has quite a paintbrush.”

I took a few more steps and shook off the wonder of the moment, only to stop in front of the most incredible tree I’ve ever seen. It had a smooth bark, lavender background, and was covered in pink, blue and green swirls. There was no doubt in my mind: Some nutty artist was painting the trees in this forest. It was the only thing that made sense. But when my mother told me to look up, I saw that the color continued to the top of the trunk. And for a brief moment, it was as though I understood the entire universe.

... When I got back home, and continued with the Jewish study classes I had begun not long before, I began to understand that it is not occasional moments of spirituality that provide a sense of meaning and purpose. Yes, those moments give us inspiration and often point us in the right direction. But it is through day-to-day study and observance that a person builds a lasting connection with that awesome Force that I sensed in the forest in Hawaii.³

3. From *Like Water on a Rock — True Stories of Spiritual Transformation* (Shaar Press).

2 Tishrei — In memory of Lorraine Gorman לעיני לאה עייה בת לייב ז"ל
Dedicated by her son Baruch Gorman

2 Nissan — In honor of Rabbi Zechariah Wallerstein. May ד' bless your noble efforts
with success. Dedicated by Chaim and Etah Kurland

LESSON
3

The Message of Rain

3 Tishrei

3 Nissan

The Torah tells us that at the time of Creation, vegetation had not yet sprouted *for Hashem Elokim had not yet sent rain on the earth and there was no man to work the soil.*¹ Rashi explains:

...there was none who could recognize the goodness of rain. When Adam came and realized that it is a necessity for the world, he prayed for it; the rain came down, and the trees and vegetation sprouted.

In commenting on Rashi's words, Maharal writes, "*It is forbidden to do good for someone if he will not recognize the good ... and if he will recognize the good (of rain) and not pray for it then certainly He will not grant it, for then he [man] would be a כַּפְּוִי טוֹב, ingrate, and he is far worse than someone who simply does not recognize that rain is good.*"²

If the rains had caused plant life to be fully developed *before* Adam's creation, he would have taken the blessings of fruits, vegetables, flowers, etc. for granted. True, he could have been made to realize later that the next crop would require rainfall for which he needed to pray, but the impact on Adam's *neshamah* would not have been the same. Adam was a greater person because as soon as he was created, he learned the lesson of *hakaras hatov*. He learned that *nothing* should be taken for granted. Every kindness should be appreciated.

Adam was a greater person because he learned the lesson of *hakaras hatov*.

Picture a man who comes home after a day's work and finds the table set and supper ready on the stove. Does he stop to contemplate all the effort that went into making that supper? Would he perhaps appreciate it more if he were present as his wife took out her pots, pans and ingredients and began her work?

1. Bereishis 2:5.

2. Maharal in his *Gur Aryeh* commentary on Rashi.

Adam was taught on the first day of his life: Do not take anything for granted.



No Way to Repay

Nothing that anyone did for Rabbi Avraham Pam went unnoticed. As the late Philadelphia Rosh Yeshivah Rabbi Elya Svei put it, “If anyone did a kindness for him, or for one of his children or grandchildren — especially in the spiritual realm — the Rosh Yeshivah felt that there was no way he could repay it. He would do everything that he possibly could for that person.”

When Rav Pam required gall bladder surgery, the surgeon, Dr. Joseph Gershbaum, attended him with great devotion during the recovery period. Rav Pam never forgot it.

When Dr. Gershbaum’s daughter became engaged, Rav Pam happily agreed to officiate at the wedding. On the day of the wedding he was not feeling well, but his feeling of *hakaras hatov* made it impossible for him not to attend.

Once, when Rav Pam visited Lakewood, he told his son R’ Asher, “I hear that Dr. Gershbaum has a nephew living here. I would like to meet him. Perhaps there is some way that I could benefit him?”³

3. *Rav Pam: The Life and Ideals of Rabbi Avraham Yaakov HaKohen Pam* (ArtScroll/Mesorah).

3 Tishrei — Masha Gittel bat Sara Pasha Golberstein שתחי
May today’s learning serve as an everlasting *zechus* for her health
3 Nissan — לענין ר' חיים יוסף בן ר' יעקב ז"ל Berliner נפטר ד' ניסן תשע"ג ת.נ.צ.ב.ה.
Dedicated by his family

LESSON
4

Adam's Error

4 Tishrei

4 Nissan

[Hashem asked,] *“Have you eaten of the tree from which I commanded you not to eat?”*

Adam replied, *“The woman whom You gave to be with me — she gave me of the tree, and I ate.”*¹

In commenting on Adam's response, Rashi² states: *באן כפר בטובה*, Here, he denied the good [that had been granted to him].

Hashem had presented Adam with a wife as an *עֵזֶר כְּגִידוֹ*, helper opposite him.³ She was a precious gift with whom he would find happiness, build a family and fulfill his spiritual mission on earth. And now he was implying, *“I'm not to blame for what I did. After all, You gave her to me — and it's because of her advice that I sinned!”*

In fact, Adam had requested a mate. The Midrash relates that when Hashem brought the various species before him, Adam said, *“All of them have a mate, and I do not!”* Immediately, Hashem brought slumber upon Adam and fashioned Chavah from him.⁴

*Pirkei D'R' Eliezer*⁵ states: *“There is nothing worse before Hakadosh Baruch Hu than to be a כְּפוּי טוֹב. ... Adam was banished from Gan Eden only because he was a כְּפוּי טוֹב, as it is written, ‘The woman whom You gave to be with me — she gave me of the tree, and I ate.’”*

Hakaras hatov, as explained earlier, is not just another positive *middah* (character trait); it is fundamental to our service of Hashem. Had Adam not demonstrated ingratitude, Hashem would have allowed him to remain in Gan Eden and would have trusted him to abstain from partaking of the Tree of Life.⁶ Now, however, he was banished.⁷

1. Bereishis 3:11-12.

2. Citing Avodah Zarah 5b.

3. Bereishis 2:18.

4. Rashi to Bereishis 2:21, citing Bereishis Rabbah 2:21.

5. Chapter 7.

6. The Torah states that Hashem banished Adam from Gan Eden *“...lest he put forth his hand and take also of the Tree of Life, and eat and live forever”* (Bereishis 3:22).

7. *Sifsei Chaim, Middos V'Avodas Hashem*, vol. I

Shlomo HaMelech says: *A refining pot is for silver and a crucible is for gold; and a man according to his praise.*⁸ Rabbi Eliyahu Lopian explains:

*The purity of a person's soul is determined by the degree to which he acknowledges and expresses thanks for the good done to him. The more he demonstrates hakaras hatov, the more exalted a spiritual level he displays.*⁹

The purity of a person's soul is determined by his level of hakaras hatov.



Putting Matters in Perspective

A *talmid* once complained to Rabbi Shlomo Freifeld, "My wife is never ready on time to go anywhere. I really can't handle it."

Rav Shlomo told him, "If you get tense over this, it's because you are not sufficiently *makir tov* (appreciative) for all that she does for you. The next time you're stuck waiting for her, focus on how you could never manage without her."

Rav Shlomo never missed an opportunity to express appreciation for the good done on his behalf. Once, he purchased an antique Indian *paroches* for his yeshivah's *aron kodesh*. The *paroches* needed some mending, and the store's seamstress accomplished this expertly. Decades later, she told Rav Shlomo's son-in-law, Rabbi Naftali Jaeger: "For forty years I worked in the back of the store making things beautiful, but no one ever noticed. But when your father-in-law came to pick up the *paroches*, he insisted on coming to the back of the store to thank me personally, telling me how magnificent my work was and how the *paroches* would adorn the yeshivah's *aron kodesh*."¹⁰

8. *Mishlei* 27:21.

9. *Lev Eliyahu*, vol. III (new edition), p. 333.

10. From *Reb Shlomo* by Rabbi Yisroel Besser (Judaica Press).

4 Tishrei — In honor of Meir Bierbrier נ"י

May the lessons in gratitude learned today serve as a perpetual *zechus*

4 Nissan — לזכות לנו ולכל ישראל לבנים ובני בנים עוסקים בתורה
ויראת שמים ומקדשים שם שמים

LESSON 5

Just One Thing

5 Tishrei

הָמֵן הָעֵץ אֲשֶׁר צִוִּיתִיךָ לְבַלְתִּי אֲכֹל מִמֶּנּוּ אֲכַלְתָּ?

Have you eaten of the tree of which I commanded you not to eat?¹

5 Nissan

The Gemara asks: Where is Haman, the arch-enemy of the Jews, alluded to in the Torah? The Gemara finds an allusion in the above verse, in which Hashem confronts Adam after he contravened Hashem's command and ate from the Tree of Knowledge. The words הָמֵן הָעֵץ can be vowelized as הָמֵן הָעֵץ, *Haman, the gallows*, alluding to Haman's fate.

At first glance, this seems to be a mere play on words, but Rabbi Aharon Kotler writes² that there is a fundamental message here.

The entire world was given to Adam “on a silver platter” so that he could devote himself solely to serving Hashem. He and Chavah were placed in Gan Eden and all their physical needs were provided for. Heavenly angels waited on them; there was no need for them to toil at all. They were permitted to eat of every luscious fruit they laid their eyes upon — except for one, that of the Tree of Knowledge. They did not obey this one restriction.

As Rav Kotler points out, Haman came from very humble beginnings, having been a slave, bathhouse attendant and barber. When he rose to prominence, he had everything — fabulous wealth, abundant offspring, near-absolute power and universal adulation.

The entire world
was given to
Adam on a
silver platter.

He lacked but one small thing. *But when Haman saw Mordechai in the king's gate and that he did not stand up and did not stir before him, Haman was filled with wrath at Mordechai.³ Incredibly, Haman was so enraged at Mordechai's behavior that he shamelessly declared, Yet all this [i.e.,*

1. Bereishis 3:11.

2. Mishnas R' Aharon, vol. I, p. 99.

3. Esther 5:9.

his wealth, offspring and power] is worth nothing to me as long as I see Mordechai the Jew sitting at the king's gate.⁴



The Car of His Dreams

Haman's behavior seems astounding, but as Rabbi Zechariah Wallerstein points out, many an ingrate behaves in similar fashion. A man can have a happy marriage, wonderful children, a good job and a nice house. One day, his next-door neighbor pulls up with a new Infiniti — a car that he knows is well out of his price range. Whenever he sees his neighbor's car, he becomes consumed with envy. All the blessings of his life are forgotten. One thought pounds in his mind: *"What did he do to deserve such a car? I'm as good a person as he is. Why him and not me?"*

Is he any different than Haman? If only he would pause to count the blessings in his life, he would feel ashamed for having such foolish thoughts. Instead of being bitter, upset and jealous, he could be very happy, grateful and upbeat. It's his choice.

We all have this choice to make in our personal lives. We can be bitter, sad and angry, or we can be grateful, happy and upbeat.

It's the choice between being a growing person or a stagnant one. Let's make the right choice.

4. Ibid. v. 13.

5 Tishrei — Shulamit Rogoff ז"ל בת אברהם נחום ז"ל
Dedicated by the Strauss, Frid and Rogoff families

5 Nissan — Chaya Zisl Lipman ז"ל ר' שמואל יעקב ז"ל
Dedicated by Menachem and Estee Lipman

LESSON 6

All in the Name

6 Tishrei

כָּאֵן כָּפַר בְּטוֹבָהּ

Here, he [Adam] denied the good [that had been granted to him].

6 Nissan

In using the word כָּאֵן, *here*, Rashi implies that on another occasion, Adam did in fact demonstrate *hakaros hatov*. Perhaps Rashi is alluding to the name that Adam conferred upon his mate: *Adam called his wife's name Chavah (חַוָּה), for she was the mother of all the living (אִם כָּל הַיְּהִי) (אִם כָּל הַיְּהִי).*¹

Rabbi Avraham Pam explains:² It is human nature that when someone is wronged by another, he focuses on his hurt and ignores, at least for the moment, the perpetrator's many qualities. After Adam denied the good that Hashem had done for him in granting him a mate and then being told his punishment for having sinned because of her, one would have expected him to view that mate with disdain.

Adam did not react this way. Instead, he chose to focus on the fact that through his wife, all future generations would come into being. In Rav Pam's words, "[In naming her 'Chavah'] Adam consoled and strengthened her, as if to say, 'Don't feel so bad about what happened. You made a mistake, but look at the positive side.

When one feels slighted, it is important to try to focus on the other person's qualities.

Your name will be 'Chavah' because you will become the mother of all mankind! You will bring life to this world!"

Adam had learned from his mistake. Now, he acknowledged how wonderful it was to have been granted a wife, and he sought to minimize her shame. And Hashem responded in kind. After they partook of the Tree of Knowledge, Adam and Chavah felt

1. *Bereishis* 3:20. The Hebrew word חַוָּה has the same meaning as חַיָּה, living. Thus her name indicates that she was the mother of all living.

2. *Ibid.* 3:21. See *A Vort From Rav Pam* by Rabbi Sholom Smith (ArtScroll/Mesorah).

shame that their bodies were not covered. The very next verse following the naming of Chavah informs us how Hashem removed their shame: *Hashem made for Adam and his wife garments of skin and He clothed them.*



An Absolute Must

Someone once asked Rav Pam whether or not one sings *Shalom Aleichim* when Yom Tov falls on Shabbos.

“There are varying *minhagim* (customs),” he responded.

“But what is the Rosh Yeshivah’s *minhag*?” the man persisted.

Rav Pam replied, “I don’t sing *Shalom Aleichem* — but *Eishes Chayil* (‘A Woman of Valor’) is not to be omitted!”

In an address on the topic of *shalom bayis* (domestic harmony), Rav Pam said, “Maintaining *shalom bayis* is the greatest challenge that married people face. One must continuously work on improving it, and appreciating and honoring the unique qualities of his or her spouse and the many blessings that Hashem has bestowed upon them.”

Rav Pam would say that he learned many lessons of good *middos* from his *rebbe*, Rabbi Shlomo Heiman.³ When *talmidim* would come to Rav Shlomo on Yom Tov, he would say a *dvar Torah*, then point to the cake on the table and say, “And now it is time for the Rebbetzin’s *shiur*!”

When a doctor informed Rav Shlomo that he could no longer have salt in his diet, the Rosh Yeshivah turned to his wife and asked with a smile, “Do you think that it is possible for you to cook food that is *un taam* (tasteless)?”⁴

3. Rosh Yeshivah of Mesivta Torah Vodaath from 1935-1944.

4. *Rav Pam: The Life and Ideals of Rabbi Avraham Yaakov HaKohen Pam* (ArtScroll/Mesorah).

6 Tishrei — May today’s learning be a זכות for Rabbi Wallerstein in gratitude for all he does for כלל ישראל. Dedicated by Torah Anytime

6 Nissan — Rachel Shaya—Mograby ע"ה בת מרגלית ע"ה רחל ע"ה נשמת רחל ע"ה
Dedicated in her memory by her loving children

LESSON 7

A Healthy Outlook

7 Tishrei

7 Nissan

A person with a healthy outlook on life recognizes the infinite goodness that Hashem showers upon this world and views it as Hashem's personal kindness to him. Unfortunately, there are people who take this world for granted and complain when it rains too hard, rains too little, the temperature is too hot, too cold, etc.

This was the sin of the *Dor HaMabul* (Generation of the Flood). Their material wealth and pleasure, coupled with exceedingly long life to enjoy it all, made them arrogant and caused them to take this world for granted. They said, "For what do we need a Creator? For a drop of rain? We can make do with our rivers and wellsprings." Hashem responded, "You anger Me with the good that I have showered upon you — with that very water you will be punished."¹

The Torah states that the *Mabul* destroyed **אֶת כָּל הַיְקוּם**, *all existence*.² *Baal HaTurim* notes that the exact same words are used to describe the loss of possessions when the ground swallowed Korach and his assembly.³ Korach was one of the generation's wealthiest men. He too became arrogant, and instead of appreciating his important position as a *levi* wanted more.

As *Mesillas Yesharim* points out, poverty is a test, and so is wealth. The "good life" can become a curse, instead of the blessing that it should be, when people view their material blessing as an end unto itself, and something to which they are entitled.

Poverty is a
test, and so is
wealth.

Our forefather Yaakov left Lavan's house fabulously wealthy. He declared to Hashem, *I have been diminished by all the kindnesses and by all the truth that You have done for Your servant*.⁴ Because Yaakov felt that he deserved nothing, he

1. *Sanhedrin* 108a.

2. *Bereishis* 7:23.

3. *Devarim* 11:6.

4. *Bereishis* 32:11.

did not cease praying. And when he prayed, Hashem answered him.



Behind the Counter

At a wedding, Mrs. Chana Friedman⁵ was seated at a table of distinguished rebbetzins. Mrs. Friedman was a wealthy woman of aristocratic bearing and was admired for her great philanthropic work.

At one point in the conversation, she turned to a rebbetzin and remarked, “Time passes so quickly. It seems like only yesterday that I was working behind the counter in a bakery and you were coming in to buy bread.”

A woman at that table was amazed that Mrs. Friedman was not uncomfortable reminding everyone that there was a time when she and her husband were far from wealthy. However, on further reflection, she realized that this was what made Mrs. Friedman so special. Because she never forgot her simple beginnings, she was always grateful for Hashem’s blessings and conducted herself with genuine humility. She made poor people feel comfortable in her home, and she helped them in a private way, out of the limelight. And when her husband spotted an indigent fellow eating a meal in the kitchen of the catering hall at his son’s *sheva berachos*, he led the man to a table and seated him with his guests.

5. Name has been changed.

7 Tishrei — In honor of Moti Koslowitz נ"י, May the lessons in gratitude learned today be a perpetual *zechus* for you and your family

7 Nissan — With סוד הכרת הטוב in honor of our son Sholy נ"י upon his upcoming *bar mitzvah*, Dedicated by Cirri & Ushi Shafran