

## THANKSGIVING

We, the American citizenry, are a thankful lot. Our calendar is dotted with days when we express our gratitude to various individuals and entities. On Veterans Day, we thank the members of the Armed Forces for their dedicated service. On Memorial Day, we show our gratitude to those courageous men and women who made the ultimate sacrifice while defending our liberties and democratic lifestyle. On Labor Day, we express our appreciation to the industrious American workforce, the people who keep the wheels of our economy turning. On other selected days, we pause to thank different historic individuals who have made valuable contributions to our nation. And then there is Thanksgiving. The day when we thank G-d for enabling all the above - and for all else He does for us.

There is no doubt that this great country's historically unprecedented success and prosperity is due to the fact that its Founding Fathers recognized that there is a Supreme Being who provides and cares for every creature. They understood that since G-d sustains and gives life to every being, it follows that every being has certain "unalienable rights" upon which no government can impinge.

These strong morals upon which our republic was founded express themselves to this day in American life. Looking at the dollar bill and seeing "In God We Trust" is a reassurance that, as a people, we still recognize and acknowledge the Source of all our achievements.

As Jewish citizens of this land, we always look to the Torah for a deeper perspective and additional insight. What light does the Torah shed on the wonderful trait of thankfulness? Actually, there is one particular mitzvah which is completely devoted to expressing gratitude - the Mitzvah of Bikkurim (in this weeks Torah portion). During the Temple era, every farmer was commanded to bring to the Holy Temple in Jerusalem the first fruits which ripened in his orchard. There he would recite a passage thanking G-d for the Land and its bountiful harvest, and the fruits were given to the Kohanim (priests). The Midrash extols the great virtue of this Mitzvah, going so far as to say that the Land of Israel was given to the

Jews as a reward for the Mitzvah of Bikkurim they would observe after entering the Land!

While the importance of expressing deserved gratitude is self-understood, it is difficult to comprehend the special significance of bikkurim. Isn't the Jewish day jam-packed with "thank you"s? The first words we utter when waking in the morning express our thanks to G-d for returning our souls to our bodies. Thrice daily during the course of prayer, we thank G-d for everything imaginable. Before and after eating, we thank G-d for the food. There is even a blessing recited upon exiting the restroom, thanking G-d for normal bodily function!

With all the thanking which occurs on a daily basis, why the need for a specific Mitzvah to emphasize the point? And why the great reward for this particular form of expressing thanks?

The Lubavitcher Rebbe, Rabbi Menachem M. Schneerson OBM, points out one obvious difference between Bikkurim and all the other ways we thank G-d: Bikkurim involves more than just words - it requires a commitment; the gratitude must express itself in deeds. Bikkurim implies that our thankfulness to G-d cannot remain in the realm of emotions, thoughts, or even speech, but must also move us to action.

While the mitzvah of Bikkurim in its plainest sense is not practicable today, its lesson is timeless. Our gratitude to G-d must express itself in the actions of our daily life. Giving back the "first of our fruit," the choicest share of the crop, is the only appropriate way to thank G-d for giving us all our fruit.

*By Rabbi Naftali Silberberg  
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## I'M A JEWISH BODY PART

David was driving down the highway one day when he noticed a man sporting a Kippah standing near a broken-down car. He pulled over to see if he could help. While assisting the fellow, he was surprised to see a cross dangling from his neck. Unable to contain his curiosity he asked, "Are you Jewish, by any chance?" The fellow responded, "No, not at all." "So what's with the skullcap?" David asked.

"Oh, that. My mother gave it to me years ago saying that if I ever got stuck on the highway and needed help, I

should put this on and I'd get help in no time. Hasn't failed me yet..."

## Part of a Whole

Some Mitzvot are communal obligations; others bind the individual. Some highlight the collective whole of our people; others draw attention to each unique piece of the Jewish puzzle.

(An example of a community-based mitzvah is the biblical command to appoint a king. Far from a personal expression of faith and commitment, like Shabbat or Kosher for example, this Mitzvah focuses on, services, and obligates the nation as a whole.) There is, however, one particular "personal" Mitzvah that teaches that even as we explore our individual path towards G-d, our personal journey and destiny is deeply intertwined with, and part of the process and progress of our nation. We are each but one beautiful tree in a breathtaking forest, one musical note in the haunting and moving melody of our people: indispensable, perhaps, but part of a blessed whole.

## Sweet Gifts

*"It will be when you enter the land that G-d, your G-d, gives you as an inheritance, and you possess it and dwell in it, that you shall take of the first of every fruit of the ground that you bring in from your land that G-d, your G-d, gives you, and you shall put it in a basket and bring it to place that G-d, your G-d, will choose to make His name rest there. Then you shall call out and say before G-d..."* [The following verses can be summed up in two words:] "Thank you!"

The Mitzvah to bring the best fruit of our land as a display of gratitude towards G-d for all that He does for us - as a community and as individuals - is by all means a deeply personal one. We each have so much to be thankful for in our lives. Upon reflection, life is much better than we (often) make it out to be. Just take a moment to think about how many of life's important gifts you possess.

Journeying to the Holy Temple was thus an annual moment of pause which provided that necessary shift of focus. Figuratively, it represents the moments in our lives when we stop to put things into perspective and think about how much there is to be grateful for.

Our sages break down the opening verse quoted earlier: "It will be when you enter the land that G-d gives you

### PARSHAT KI TAVO

14 - 20 Elul 5785  
7 - 13 September 2025

Torah: Duet. 26:1-29:8  
Haftorah: Isaiah 60:1-22

PSALMS DAILY

### Psalms for our brethren in the Holy Land

*Psalm 117*

1. Praise the Lord, all nations, laud Him, all peoples.
2. For His kindness has overwhelmed us, and the truth of the Lord is eternal. Hallelujah!

(Please say Chapter 20 daily)

SEFER HAMITZVOT

### Negative Mitzvah 107 Switching the Sacrificial Designation of an Animal

It is forbidden to switch the sacrificial designation of an animal; e.g., to take an animal designated as a Peace Offering and bring it as a Guilt Offering.

### Positive Mitzvah 107 Ritual Impurity Contracted through Contact with a Corpse

We are commanded regarding the ritual impurity contracted through contact with a human corpse. [I.e., if contracted, one must follow all the associated laws of impurity.]

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as an inheritance, and you possess it and dwell in it."

There's entering, possessing, and dwelling in a land.

Entering it is the equivalent of passing through border control. One enters a land when his feet walk its soil.

Possessing it means owning it. In the case of the Land of Israel, this came about through its conquest.

Dwelling in it means apportioning the land to the people, without which the land's acquisition through conquest is meaningless. One can practically enjoy the land only when he can call a piece of it his own.

For this reason, the obligation to bring of the land's fruit as a token of appreciation was reserved until after the land was apportioned. Until that point the joy and gratitude that people felt were incomplete.

And here's where things get strange.

Historically, the land's conquest took seven years, which was followed by seven years of apportioning. Both processes were gradual: as land was conquered it was allocated.

It would be expected, then, that immediately upon receiving their piece of real estate, each family's obligation to express thanks would commence.

And yet, according to the biblical commentator Rashi, that was not the case. The obligation of Bikkurim (bringing the first fruit to the Temple) began only after the very last piece of the land was distributed, when the land was settled in its entirety.

The reasoning and message here is extraordinary.

The Jewish people are not individuals of a community or a community of individuals; they are like limbs of a single body.

When one limb - big or small, primary or secondary - is hurting, the entire body hurts. If even one faculty of a body is faulty, the body in its entirety is incomplete.

In Judaism, one can have much, but not all, until every last member of the family is tended to. Until then, our joy and gratitude is lacking. The collective security and comfort of every last one of our people, no matter his level of affiliation or contribution, is essential to the happiness we each experience on a personal level.

For this reason, in biblical times each individual Jew's personal show of gratitude was not made until every last family was provided for.

The story is told of Rabbi Yechezkel of Kozmir, a great Chasidic master, who once visited his colleague, the legendary Rabbi Bunim of P'shischa.

Towards the end of their conversation, Rabbi Yechezkel took out a box of snuff and offered some to his friend. After delighting in a whiff, Rabbi Bunim asked, "Tell me, Yechezkel, how did you know that precisely at this moment I needed some snuff?"

Rabbi Yechezkel replied, "Tell me, Bunim, how the hand knows when the nose desires a bit of snuff...?"

#### **What's in It for Me?**

Rabbi Cheshed Halberstam would often help out in the Rebbe's home. He relates that he was once present when the Rebbe came home for dinner, and noticed that before sitting down to eat, the Rebbe walked over to a charity box stationed near the dining room table and placed a few coins inside.

He eventually came to realize that this was a nightly routine of the Rebbe. Before tending to his own needs, the Rebbe participated in providing for the needs of another.

What a beautiful custom.

*By Rabbi Mendel Kalmenson  
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## KI TAVO IN A NUTSHELL

The name of the Parshah, "Ki Tavo," means "when you come," and it is found in Deuteronomy 26:1.

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 (bikkurim) 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 Eival—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."

## IN JEWISH HISTORY

*Sunday, 14 Elul 5785 - 7 September 2025*

### **Passing of Rabbi Boruch M. Ettinger (1852)**

Rabbi Boruch Mordechai Ettinger was a follower of the first three Chabad Rebbes, Rabbi Schneur Zalman (the Alter Rebbe), Rabbi DovBer (the Mittler Rebbe), and Rabbi Menachem Mendel (the Tzemach Tzedek). He served as head of the Talmudic academy in Vilna (Vilnius) and then as rabbi in Babruysk, a post he filled for fifty years. Toward the end of his life he returned to Jerusalem, where he passed away on 14 Elul 5612 (1852).

*Monday, 15 Elul 5785 - 8 September 2025*

### **Tomchei Temimim Founded (1897)**

The Yeshivah "Tomchei Temimim Lubavitch", the first to integrate the "revealed" part of Torah (Talmud and Halachah) with the esoteric teachings of Chassidism in a formal study program, was founded on 15 Elul 5657 (1897) by the fifth Lubavitcher Rebbe, Rabbi Sholom DovBer.

*Wednesday, 17 Elul 5785 - 10 September 2025*

### **Noah Dispatches Dove (2105 BCE)**

Following the failed attempt to dispatch a raven from the ark, Noah sent a dove from the window of the ark to see if the great Flood that covered the earth had abated. "But the dove found no resting place for the sole of its foot" and returned to the ark; Noah waited seven days before making another attempt.

### **Outbreak of World War II (1939)**

On 17 Elul 5699 (1939), the Nazi Wehrmacht invaded Poland, launching World War II. The war would prove to be the deadliest conflict in history, resulting in the death of some 60 million people, including the six million Jews murdered in the Holocaust as part of the so-called "Final Solution".

*Thursday, 18 Elul 5785 - 11 September 2025*

### **Passing of the Maharal of Prague (1609)**

18 Elul is the Yahrtzeit of Rabbi Yehudah Loewe, the "Maharal" of Prague (5285-5369, or 1525-1609), outstanding Torah scholar, philosopher, Kabbalist and Jewish leader. He authored many works, including a super-commentary to Rashi's commentary on the Torah. He is popularly known for creating a "golem" (clay man) to protect the Jewish community of Prague from the frequent threat of blood libels.

### **Baal Shem Tov Born (1698)**

Rabbi Israel Baal Shem Tov, the founder of Chassidism, was born on 18 Elul 5458 (1698) in a small town in the Ukraine. His father, Rabbi Eliezer, who was a member of the secret society of "hidden Tzaddikim," passed away when young Israel was only five years old; his last words to his son were, "Fear nothing but G-d alone. Love every Jew with all your heart and all your soul."

The young orphan would spend much of his time wandering and meditating in the forests that surrounded his hometown; there, he one day met with one of his father's compatriots, and eventually

joined their society. For many years, he lived disguised as a simple innkeeper and clay-digger, his greatness known only to a very small circle of fellow mystics and disciples. But on his 36<sup>th</sup> birthday, he was instructed by his master to "reveal" himself and publicly disseminate his teachings.

Drawing from the mystical "soul of Torah," the Baal Shem Tov ("Master of the Good Name," as he came to be known) taught about the spark of G-dliness that is to be found in every creation, and about the great love that G-d has for each and every one of His children, scholars and simple folk alike. He emphasized the importance of joy and simple faith in serving G-d, rather than asceticism. Initially, his teachings encountered fierce opposition from the scholarly elite and established leadership of the Jewish community; but many of those very scholars and communal leaders ended up becoming his devoted disciples. When Rabbi Israel passed at age 62 on Shavuot of 5520 (1760), the movement he founded was well on the way of becoming the most vital force in Jewish life.

### **1<sup>st</sup> Chabad Rebbe Born (1745)**

Rabbi Schneur Zalman of Liadi (5505-5562, or 1745-1812), founder of the "Chabad" branch of Chassidism, was born on 18 Elul - the 47<sup>th</sup> birthday of his "spiritual grandfather", Rabbi Israel Baal Shem Tov (Rabbi Schneur Zalman was the disciple of the Baal Shem Tov's disciple and successor, Rabbi DovBer of Mezeritch).