



Parshas Ki Tsavo 2021, the intent of intention

This week's Parsha Perspective is in loving memory of Edward Ben Efraim & Shlomo Ben Edward. As well as in honor of the Refuah Shlema of Shaul Ben Berta, Sasson Bezalel Ben Batia, Chana Bas Ester & Yirachmiel Daniel Ben Tova Basha.

This week's Parsha Perspective is in honor of the Bris of David Yechezkel. May he and his family be blessed with much health, happiness, and nachas!

Our Parsha continues Moshe's final address to the Jewish people. He begins by teaching the laws applicable once the Jewish nation settles down in Israel. The first commandment is Bikurim, the Mitzvah of bringing the first fruits of each year's harvest to the Beis Hamikdash. This Mitzvah applies to the seven fruits and produce that Israel is known for wheat, barley, dates, figs, grapes, pomegranates, and olives.

He continues with the Mitzvah of Maaser, giving a percentage of one's produce to the Kohanim, Levites, and people in need. There is also a Maaser that a person must give, which can only be eaten in Jerusalem. There is a small prayer when giving maaser to thank G-d for the opportunity to share His blessings with the world.

It concludes with a famous Pasuk (26:15) *"Look down from Your holy dwelling, from the heavens, and bless Your people Israel and the ground which You have given to us, as You swore to our forefathers a land flowing with milk and honey."*

However, a question comes to mind: In the prayer that is recited when bringing maaser to the Beis Hamikdash, we say (26:14) *"I did not eat any of it while in mourning, nor did I eat any of it while impure."* But what is the reason we need to assert that we did not make any of the above mistakes? Why do we need to proclaim our innocence?!

Rashi (*Rav Shlomo Yitzchaki, the foremost commentary on the Torah*) explains that one of the maaser's is eaten by everyone as long as they are in Jerusalem. Hence, some might think that this maaser is not as holy as the others and may eat it while impure. Or, if someone loses a loved one, the law is that they are not allowed to do any Mitzvot until the burial is completed.

This law obligates a person to prioritize and focus on the funeral before praying, helping the poor, and eating maaser-sacred food. Therefore, Moshe commanded the person declare that they understand the sanctity of the food despite being able to eat it themselves, not just priests in the Beis Hamikdash.

However, the Ibn Ezra (*the famous Spanish Rabbi, Rav Avraham Ben Meir Ibn Ezra*) gives a deeper and more profound explanation. He writes when Moshe commanded that we must announce, *"I did not eat any of it while in mourning, nor did I eat any of it while impure."* He is referring to the **sadness** and **"mourning"** of having to **give away the produce they work so strenuously on**. They might have **improper** or **"impure"** thoughts on **how giving away the fruits of their hard labor is not fair**.

The Ibn Ezra explains that a Kohen can undermine a sacrifice by not having the correct intention when offering a sacrifice. Comparably, a farmer giving or eating maaser can ruin its sacredness by not realizing who gave him this food. If the farmer regrets bringing his produce, he undercuts the value of his good deed.

The Rambam (*Rav Moshe Ben Maimon*) in his book Mishnah Torah includes intention as one of five essential parts of prayer. He writes that people must regain their composure before praying if they are distracted.

If they are tired from traveling, they should not pray until they have rested. Since intention is both freedom from inappropriate thoughts and realizing that we are standing before the divine presence.

The Rambam explains **intention** is not only to make sure that Mitzvot are done correctly. But also to **elevate yourself and your surroundings to a higher level of G-dly revelation**. To lift the world back to its original state of completeness with G-d's dwelling along with the ultimate redemption!

The lesson of the Ibn Ezra is ever more prevalent as we begin Selichot this Saturday night. We say a unique and special prayer at midnight to beg and plead for forgiveness as we approach the new year.

It is well known that **G-d cares about the sincerity of our prayers more than their quantity**. For it is our **intent** and openness with G-d that carries our prayers to His heavenly throne.

In our daily life, it is imperative that we understand that the intention behind our actions matters. Whether we are praying to G-d, giving charity, or even smiling at another person, our intention makes all the difference. Even the smallest good deeds go a long way when our intention is pure.

***“A deed done without devotion,
for all its effects on the lives of others,
leaves the life of the doer unaffected.
The true goal for man is to be what he does.”***

*Have a meaningful Shabbos,
Rabbi Sholom Yemini*