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**Criticized by Family Members**

**For Becoming Religious**

**By**[**Miriam Racquel Feldman**](https://www.chabad.org/search/keyword_cdo/kid/23784/jewish/Feldman-Miriam-Racquel.htm)



Dear Rachel,

My family is giving me a hard time about the changes I’m making in my efforts to become more religious. They don’t understand why I won’t eat at their favorite restaurant anymore, why it’s so important for me to wear modest clothes, or why I won’t drive with them to Aunt Marsha’s on Saturday. They think that the laws are stupid and separate me from them. And sometimes, I think that they’re right! I feel so alone and it makes me question the journey that I am on.

But I want to do things according to the Torah. What they refer to as “archaic.” I see timeless wisdom. My journey would be so much easier if my family would let up and be more respectful and understanding. How can I navigate this?

**Dear Awesome Woman,**

I hear you, and I’m sorry that you’re experiencing this. Your journey is difficult as it is, without being ridiculed. How much more difficult it is when others are acting unkind.

And I’m so sorry that you’re feeling alone. Know that you are truly not. There are so many of us who have taken similar journeys with our own share of difficulties and loneliness, too. We have come to understand that G‑d is right there with us, and yet on this physical plane we can’t necessarily feel the support or hear the answers in each of these difficult moments. For each grimace and snide comment that our families make, there is pain.

So let’s take it slow. Here are a few suggestions:

**1. You are not the rabbi for your family and friends.**

You do not need to explain each law or [Torah](https://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/1426382/jewish/Torah.htm) teaching to your family; that’s not your job. While you can briefly explain what you do and why you do it, it’s not your responsibility to convince them of anything. Your job is to try and maintain a loving connection despite the changes that you are making. I don’t know what your relationship has been with your family until now. Usually, the same patterns that existed before are there *after* you become observant, too.

**2. Be as independent as you can be.**

Can you work, earn money and not live in your family home if they are not keeping kashrut and observing mitzvahs like you are? Or if you must live at home, can you pay for your own food and needs?

Try not to rely on your family for sustenance. They have boundaries as well, and if they don’t understand what you’re doing, then they also don’t need to support it financially or even emotionally. Sure, we’d love them to, but that is not a requirement of a family member.

To treat you kindly and respectfully is a requirement—just like they would a stranger—but to financially or emotionally support you is not. As painful as it is, they do not *need* to understand you. Your rabbi or rebbetzin or friends and community who share your journey with you will understand you. Make sure to spend time developing those relationships (even connecting online will help you feel supported and understood).

**3. Check your energy; how are you showing up?**

People can sense our energy. If you’re feeling insecure and defensive, your family will sense that. If you’re confident in what you are doing and believing, they will feel that energy from you.

Are you being too critical of yourself? The kinder you are to yourself, the kinder others will be to you, too.

Are you being ornery? Entitled? Uncompromising? Are you being wishy-washy? Or the opposite—are you being “holier than thou” and judgmental?

If you’re judging others—“They’re not religious enough,” “They’re not doing what they’re supposed to do,” and even, “They should understand me”—that will be felt. People respond to the energy behind your words, not necessarily to the words themselves. Speak to your mentors, rabbis and rebbetzins, or enlist the help of a safe coach to guide you through this transition so you can be as respectful as possible to yourself as well as others.

**4. Set boundaries to maintain your mental and emotional health.**

If you’re showing up with kindness, and your family is being critical, pressuring and unkind (probably patterns from before you took the journey to religious observance), you may be feeling shame, hurt, sadness and anger. That anger may be letting you know that there is a “boundary violation” going on, and it is very important to assess for healthy boundary setting. It’s not OK to be treated with disdain.

This is where you can practice speaking up for yourself, distancing when you need to and treating yourself with the respect and kindness you deserve.

It’s also important to only share what feels safe to you. Your vulnerability is very important. If family members have the past pattern of trampling on that preciousness, then it is wise to stop sharing your thoughts and feelings. This is setting boundaries for yourself: Have respectful interactions, but don’t share your innards.

If you don’t live with your family, then you can be respectful by making brief phone calls or visits. And even if you do live with them, interact wisely. Spend the time focusing on them and their welfare. You don’t need to share what you are doing or learning.

By setting up boundaries, you’ll avoid resentment and you’ll also be taking accountability for your life. You need energy for embracing this new path towards a Torah life, as well as energy for your creative endeavors. Having limits allows you to say yes to beautiful things on your soul’s path.

If your family members are the type (and you would know this by now since you have grown up with them) where it is possible to have open conversations, then do so using “I” statements. For example, you could say: *“I feel misunderstood, and that makes sense considering that I am taking a different path than I used to. Maybe there is fear and worry on your part. I do love you and I am being as cautious as possible on my journey. I’d love to be close to you during this time of transition. What I need is love, kindness and acceptance as I am making my choices and decisions, as kooky as they may be to others. I will also try to be kind and respectful to you, though I won’t be choosing to do some of the things that I used to do—like eating non-kosher food or driving on Shabbat.”*

**5. Celebrate you!**

You are on an incredibly brave journey, leaving a familiar past and entering into the unknown. Put your arms up in the air and say, “Yay, me!” What a beautiful statement of courage. The Torah life is a beautiful one—one where you choose to cherish your soul. Good for you!

[](https://www.chabad.org/search/keyword.aspx?kid=23784)

[Miriam Racquel Feldman](https://www.chabad.org/5011456) is a somatic mind-body healer, clarity coach and relationship expert who helps empower women to trust themselves through the wisdom of their bodies and intuition. Marriage magic, dating guidance, toxic relationship detox, career clarity and emotional/physical pain relief are her specialties.

*Reprinted from the Parshat Ki Tavo 5781 email of Chabad.Org Magazine.*

**Parshas Ki Savoh:**

**The Mitzvah to be Happy**

**By Rabbi Bentzion Shafier**

**Founder of TheSmuz.com**



**All Physical Manifestations**

**Have a Spiritual Counterpart**

“*Because you did not serve HASHEM, your G-d, amid gladness and goodness of heart when everything was abundant*.” — Devarim 28:47

**The Destiny of the Jews**

The fate of the Jewish people is unlike that of any other nation. We are either exalted and revered, or downtrodden and oppressed — there is no middle ground. If we follow the ways of HASHEM, the Torah assures us that we will live a life of prosperity, abundance, and peace. Secure in our borders, finding only goodness and happiness in our land, we will be blessed. However, if we reject HASHEM’s ways, then we will be cursed; oppressed, and tortured, — hunted down by our enemies until we are thrown out of our land…

At the end of a long prophecy of what will befall us if we don’t follow the ways of HASHEM, the Torah seems to lay the blame on one issue: because you did not serve HASHEM, your G-d, amid gladness and goodness of heart when everything was abundant. It seems the pivotal point of these two extremes is based on simcha.-- Implying that serving HASHEM with happiness is critical to our success as a nation.

Rabbeinu Bachya explains that this is because the mitzvahs must be done with joy and complete devotion. When the mitzvahs are done without joyfulness, they are lacking in their effect, and this can be part of the spiral downward.

He then gives an example of a mitzvah that wasn’t done with complete motivation. The Medrash tells us that when Reuvain attempted to save Yosef from his brothers, he said, “Let us put him in the pit.” His intention was to buy some time to eventually save him. However, had he realized that he would be recorded in history as the one who saved Yosef, he would have put him on his shoulders and carried him home to his father. From here we see the importance of doing a mitzvah with complete dedication and commitment.

**The Power of Simcha**

This Rabbeinu Bachaya is difficult to understand on two levels. First, how can the Torah command me to be happy? Being happy isn’t an emotion that we can turn on and off like a light switch. And second, how can we compare the effect of doing a mitzvah joyfully to the case of Reuvain? That was a classic example of kavod. We are well aware that honor is one of the most powerful driving forces in the human condition.

Public recognition, fame, and having one’s name in the floodlights of history are things that people in every generation kill for. Granted Reuvain was a tzaddik, but the fact that he would have been titled the savior of Yosef for eternity is something that would propel a man to extremes. How can that be compared to something as minor as joy in the performance of a mitzvah? While happiness when doing a mitzvah may be a nicety, it certainly can’t be ranked up there with kavod as a driving force.

The answer to these questions can best be understood through a different perspective.

**If I Were a Rich Man**

Sheldon G. Adelson, the son of immigrant parents, grew up in a poor neighborhood of Boston. His father was a taxi driver; his mother ran a knitting store. At a young age, Adelson began showing an entrepreneurial spirit, first by selling newspapers on local street corners, and then by becoming the owner of his first business at age twelve. Over the course of his working career, he built over fifty companies. He was until his recent petirah the owner of Las Vegas Sands Corp., the parent company of the Venetian Resort.

In 2003, his net worth was ranked at 1.4 billion dollars. While that is an impressive sum, it didn’t put him anywhere near the richest people in the world. However, when he took his company public, a rather interesting thing happened. His personal wealth increased by 750%. By 2004, his personal worth had increased to over 20 billion dollars, making him the fifth richest man in the world. Forbes magazine estimates that over those two years, Adelson’s fortune had been growing by $1 million every hour.

Imagine for a moment what it must feel like to know that your wealth is increasing at that rate. You sit down to a leisurely lunch and walk away a million dollars richer. Open a Gemarah for the Daf HaYomi – there’s another $750,000. Lie down for a Shabbos nap; wake up three million dollars wealthier. What it’s like to be alive! Every moment I live, I become richer, and richer…. Life is great!

This example carries a very real message to us.

**I Have No Plans of Dying**

The single most difficult concept that we human beings deal with is our mortality. While we are cognitively aware of it, emotionally we just don’t feel it will happen. With that emotional blindness comes blindness to the value of our actions. Since in our operating reality, I will never die, then what I do or don’t do really doesn’t matter.

If for a flashing moment, I were to see what the World to Come will be like for me, I would effectively lose free will. The extraordinary accomplishment of one mitzvah would so overwhelm me that I would be completely and radically different — not different physically, not smarter, but much more driven to accomplish my purpose in life.

When Chazal tell us over and over again that mitzvahs are worth far more than the greatest treasures in this world, it is because they had that clarity. They understood what it will be like for each of us as we regale in our great wealth. In that World, we will look back at every chance we had to grow as the greatest opportunity ever given to man. We will look back at our mitzvahs, and they will bring us far more joy than earning than a million dollars an hour.

This seems to be the answer to Rabbenu Bachya. One of the greatest motivators in the human is enthusiasm. That enthusiasm is based on a value system. If I value money, I will be driven to pursue it, and the acquisition of it will bring me great joy. If I gain a deeper perspective on life, then I experience elation, knowing that my net worth in the World to Come is growing at an incredible rate. My investments are paying back in spades. That excitement is one of the most powerful motivating forces — equal even to kavod. With it, a person can reach great heights. Without it, a person’s avodas HASHEM can become stale and lose its potency, thus beginning a downward spiral.

The Simcha from doing a mitzvah is both a byproduct of being tuned into the effects of my actions, and at the same time, it changes the very essence of that mitzvah, catapulting it into a different category of act. And, on the flip side, if a person performs mitzvahs without that enthusiasm then it’s both an indication of his value system being off, and consequentially the energy and vigor with which he performs his mitzvahs with will be lacking.

Ultimately, joy is a great force that both allows a person to enjoy his short stay in this world and propels him to achieve the greatness for which he was created.

*Reprinted from the current website of TheShmuz.com*

**Rabbi Berel Wein on**

**Parshat Ki Tavo**



The opening words of this week's Torah reading have been repeated often throughout the entire discourse by Moshe with the Jewish people which constitutes the bulk of this book of Devarim. This two-word phrase, KI TAVO, should be understood as meaning “when you will come into the land of Israel,” and not an alternative meaning of "if you will conquer the land of Israel".

There is a certainty in the words of Moshe regarding the Jewish people and the land of Israel. He assures them that they will certainly come into the land, and even though it is temporarily occupied by strong and inimical tribes and nations, the land belongs to the Jewish people by the commitment made to our father Abraham, the founder of Judaism.

One of the outstanding, almost wondrous, characteristics of the Jewish people throughout their long and bitter exile, has been the certainty that resides in their hearts and minds that they would one day return to settle the land of Israel once again. This certainty was inserted into all the prayers of Israel in every generation.

The Jewish people made commitments to Heaven that they would return to the land of Israel. and there they would fulfill their mission of service to the God of Israel. The influence of our teacher Moshe was so strong and lasting, that even thousands of years later, the Jewish people accepted his assurances that they would return to the land of Israel, and always thought of it as being a case of when and not if it would happen.

The question existed only regarding when it would be possible for the Jewish people to return and settle in the land of Israel. We were never told in advance how this would happen, and who would be agents that would facilitate this return. In the imagination of the Jewish people, they dreamed of a miraculous return, accompanied by a renaissance of goodness and spirituality.

The past two centuries of Jewish history have been marked by the unexpected and inexplicable events that have led to the return of the Jewish people to their land, and sovereignty over the land of Israel. The steps in which this occurred were unforeseen by anyone. Many of the leading actors in this drama, who propelled the project forward towards its completion, certainly by the measurement of Jewish standards, were the most unlikely people to accomplish such an end. Nevertheless, the certainty implanted within us by our teacher Moshe long ago stood the test of time and the vicissitudes of events, so that no matter how unlikely such a return to the land of Israel seemed to be, the masses of the Jewish people believed that it would indeed occur and rallied to help it occur.

Unfortunately, there are Israel deniers that currently exist within the framework of Jewish society. Like the Holocaust deniers, they are anxious to escape from his destiny of the Jewish people. It is tragic in the extreme that in the face of all the wonders and accomplishment of the Jewish people in the land of Israel in our time, there are those that still are deaf to the words of both Moshe and of the certainty of Jewish national existence in the land of Israel.

*Reprinted from the current website of rabbiwein.com*

**A Jew’s Obligation to**

**Elevate the Fruits of His Labors**

**From the Talks of the Lubavitcher Rebbe**

**Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson, Zt”l**



This week's Torah portion, Ki Tavo, contains the mitzva of bikurim, first fruits. The bikurim had to be of the finest fruits that were produced in the land of Israel, the first to mature in a particular season, and they were brought to the Holy Temple in Jerusalem before their owner was permitted to enjoy the rest of his bounty. By bringing the bikurim, a person expressed his thanks to G-d for His blessings. Unlike other offerings that were burned on the altar, the first fruits were given to the kohen (priest) for his own consumption.

We must always remember that all abundance comes from G-d. Our crops yield fruit not because of our merit or because of our labors, but solely due to G-d's blessing.

The farmer invests a great deal of effort before seeing results. He must plow the earth, sow his seeds, and carefully nurture his saplings. Yet, when all these labors are done, he takes those fruits and elevates them to the realm of holiness. The farmer knows that it is G-d's blessing which causes the tree to bear fruit. Accordingly, the very best of his produce rightly belongs to Him.

The bikurim, having been elevated, are given to the kohen to be eaten as part of his Divine service.

From this we learn that a Jew must serve G-d not only when he prays or learns Torah. A Jew serves G-d throughout the day, even when engaged in as mundane an activity as eating! True, such service involves a great deal of preparation, but the reward is commensurate with the effort.

The principle behind the mitzva of bikurim may be applied even today, when the Jewish people are in exile. This is true even outside the land of Israel and even on a regular weekday!

We do so by acknowledging that all our wealth and possessions come directly from G-d and by utilizing all that G-d has blessed us with for holy purposes. In this manner the Jew can turn even the simplest object into a medium for holiness. When we thank G-d for everything He gives us, all of our actions are transformed into a Divine service.

In the times of the Holy Temple, a blessing was recited when the bikurim were brought asking G-d to allow us to joyfully perform the same mitzva the following year. Likewise, whenever we utilize G-d's gifts according to His dictates, it bring s down Divine blessing so that in the future, too, we will merit to enjoy them with gladness and rejoicing.

*Reprinted from the 5756/1996 Parshat Ki Tavo edition of L’Chaim Weekly. Adapted from the works of the Lubavitcher Rebbe.- Likutei Sichot, vol. 2*

# Rav Avigdor Miller on

# Rav Miller’s Davening



**QUESTION:** Why do you daven without any big noises and without any shaking?

**ANSWER:** And the answer is, I was in Slabodka and I looked at my rebbehs. My rebbehs, when they davened they stood still like trees. They were *kulo machshava,*they were all thought. Now, I’m not that, but I want to imitate them at least. And they were *kulo machshava,* they were thinking.

I told you a story about Rav Yisroel Salanter when he once came to Varsha (Warsaw) to visit the Gerrer Rebbi. He visited the Gerrer Rebbi and when he was finished, the Gerrer Rebbi accompanied him down to the street door. It was a *chiddush!*

All of Warsaw knew that the Gerrer Rebbi had accompanied a *litvack* down to the street door. So a mob of Gerrer chassidim came to see this big tzadik. And they were following him in the street. If the Rebbi went down to the street door for him, he must be somebody!

They followed him till he came to a beis haknesses to daven Mincha. Oh, now we’re going to see a performance – we’re going to see a tzadik davening! Did you ever see a tzadik davening? I one time saw a tzadik davening – he was jumping up and down. Up and down! Jumping up and down with *hislahavus*, with a fire of ahavas Hashem.



But Rav Yisroel stood still and didn’t move as he davened. And they were so terribly disappointed. Terribly disappointed! But there was one person who was standing near him, watching him, and he was watching his forehead. And the veins on his head were swollen, they were pulsating. His mind was working very hard; *avodah sh’bileiv*. That’s what tefilah is called, service of the mind. That’s how my rebbehs davened, with their minds. TAPE # E-39 (December 1995)

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