

**Wembley Synagogue**

כי תבוא

Insights from the commentators into the Sidra of Ki Tavo

וְלָקַחְתָּ מִרְאשֵׁית כָּל פְּרֵי הָאֲדָמָה - That you shall take of the first of every fruit of the ground... and you shall put it in a basket and go to the place that G-d, your G-d, will choose, to make His name rest there. (26:2) The *Mishnah (Bikurim ch. 3)* describes in minute detail and picturesque language how these fruits were gathered, packed, and carried on the shoulders of the pilgrims all the way to the Temple, and how the dignitaries greeted them with music and song. *Bikurim (first fruits)* are included among the items that "*ein lahem shiur*" — have no specified quantities (*Pei'ah* 1:1). One might observe this *mitzvah* by giving anything — one cluster of grapes, or a few dates or olives — for an entire orchard. Another contribution was *ma'aseir sheini*. This was also to be brought to Jerusalem, but quietly without pageantry and fanfare. No special tribute was paid to the farmer for his gift, and no music was played in his honour. Why did the bringing of the first fruits arouse joy and excitement while the giving of tithes occurred without notice?

The farmer works very hard, tilling his land, pruning his trees, and trying to keep the insects from ruining his crops. Finally, after much anxiety and toil, he beholds the first ripe fruit. What joy floods his heart! He would like to taste the fruit or give it to his wife and children, but he cannot, for the first ripe fruits belong to Hashem. So he takes a blade of grass, ties it to the fruit and calls it "*Bikurim*." He then takes the fruit to the *Beit Hamikdash* in Jerusalem, where special tribute is paid to him for having the strength of character and loyalty to Hashem to give even before seeing his full harvest.

Ma'aseir sheini, on the other hand, comes much later. At the conclusion of the harvest, when the produce of the land is stored safely in the storehouse, the tithe is given. Giving at so late a date, when the farmer's granaries and storehouses are packed to overflowing, does not deserve special recognition or tribute. It is a duty performed in accordance with the requirements of the law, but no more. The lesson for us is; it is not how much one gives, but when and how. (Source: Vedibarta Bam)

וַיְבִיאֵנוּ אֵל הַמָּקוֹם הַזֶּה - And He brought us to this place and gave us this land – a Land flowing with milk and honey (26:9) Rashi explains that הַמָּקוֹם הַזֶּה – "this place" refers to the Bet Hamikdash, for a person says these words when he brings bikurim and is standing inside the Bet Hamikdash. If so, the word order seems strange. The person says that Hashem "brought us to this place and gave us this land." He first says that Hashem brought us to the Bet Hamikdash and only then does it mention Eretz Yisrael. Hashem gave us the Land long before He gave us the Bet Hamikdash.

Also, why must we read this Parsha when we bring bikurim? There is no other Mitzvah where we are commanded to read a Parsha of the Torah when we fulfill the Mitzvah.

An answer to this is offered by way of an analogy. There is a small child whose parents just gave him an expensive toy. Before allowing the child to play with it they read the instructions with him. Afterwards they ask him to repeat the instructions to make sure that he understands them, so that he will not misuse the toy and ruin it. Hashem gave us the Land of Israel, the ideal place for the spiritual development of the Jewish people. Although we can fulfill the Torah outside of Eretz Yisrael, Mitzvot done in Eretz Yisrael have a special significance and importance. In effect, when a Jew takes his first fruits to the Temple and gives them to the Kohen, he declares that he realises that Hashem gave us both the land and its fruits for the purposes of keeping His Mitzvot. Hashem wanted us to have the Temple so He brought us to the only land where the Temple could be. This is why the person bringing the bikurim first mentions that Hashem brought us to the bet Hamikdash. That Eretz Yisrael is a land flowing with milk and honey is of secondary importance, and only afterwards does he thank Hashem for giving us Eretz Yisrael also. So that we remember this clearly, Hashem commanded us to say these words when we bring the bikurim, so that we know how to use the present He gave us and appreciate its true value. (Source: Parsha Pearls)

וְשָׂמְתָּ בַּבָּטָן - And you shall place it [bikurim-first fruits that were brought as an offering] in a basket (26:2) Wealthy people brought their bikurim to the Temple in golden baskets. Poor people used baskets of straw. The golden baskets were returned to their owners, while the straw baskets remained in the Temple with the bikurim and they became the property of the priests. Given that the poor have limited resources, shouldn't it be the reverse? Now, it is possible that the fruits from some of the poor people were minimal and of inferior quality, reflecting the quality of their farm land. So, if their baskets were returned then they would

have to be emptied on the spot and a needy person may become embarrassed when the inferior fruits are exposed. (Source: Harav Aharon Bakst - P'ninim MiShulchan Govoha)

וְשִׂמְחֶתָּ בְּכָל הַטוֹב - And you shall rejoice with all the good that Hashem gave you (26:11)

When a person receives a gift from an important individual, the quality of the gift is not what gives him the greatest pleasure. Rather, the fact that someone so important thought to give him a gift is the source of the recipient's greatest enjoyment. The Torah therefore tells "And you shall rejoice with all the good that Hashem gave you". We should rejoice not only for the good that we have, but also for the fact that it is "the good that Hashem gave you". We rejoice that the goodness which we have comes from none other than Hashem. (Source: Tiferet Shlomo - Ma'ayana shel Torah)

הַשָּׁמַיִם - Gaze down from Your Holy abode, from the heavens, and bless Your People, Yisrael. (26:15) The parsha of Bikurim ends with a special prayer entreating Hashem to gaze down from His sacred abode in Heaven, and listen to the pleas of the Jewish people. The Midrash Tanchuma relates that Moshe Rabbeinu, upon seeing through Divine Inspiration, that the Bet HaMikdash will one day be destroyed, established for a ritual of three daily prayers. Prayer is even more beloved to Hashem than good deeds and sacrifices. We see from here that there is an intrinsic relationship between prayer and Bikurim.

Rav Gedaliah Schorr, zl, explains that both through the mediums of Bikurim and of prayer, one recognises and conveys the notion that everything comes from Hashem. It is for this reason that we begin the Shemoneh Esrei prayer with the berachah of "Atah chonen l'adam da'at," "You graciously endow man with knowledge," a prayer that expresses our gratitude for being endowed with intelligence and the ability to recognise the source of all things. Likewise, in the Bikurim entreaty we convey our gratitude for the blessings that we have been granted. Consequently, Moshe implored Hashem that the Jewish people always retain the power of prayer - even when the Bais HaMikdash and its ensuing mitzvah of Bikurim are no longer functional. The recognition of "Atah chonen," "You graciously endow," catalyses our hakorat ha'tov, appreciation and gratitude, for all that Hashem does for us. (Source: Peninim on the Torah)

Bikurim is a mitzva that is applicable when the Jewish people are settled in Eretz Yisroel (the Land of Israel). This mitzva entails bringing the first fruits of one's field to the Kohen (priest) in the Mikdash (sanctuary).

It is remarkable that the Torah commands the farmer to give away to the Kohen his very first fruits - fruits which give him special joy and pride. After all, it makes no difference to the Kohen if he receives the farmer's first fruits or his second fruits. Why then does the Torah command the grower to take fruit that is dear to him and give it to a recipient who would just as soon receive any other fruit? It is appropriate that as one enjoys the bounty of his harvest, he should bear in mind that all the blessings that he enjoys come from Hashem. By bringing Bikurim, one demonstrates and internalizes this by celebrating his new harvest with the real owner of his fields - Hashem. So to speak, by bringing Bikurim to the Mikdash one "shares" the joy of the first fruits with Hashem.

We can now understand why Bikurim had to be brought from the first fruits. While the Kohanim had the privilege of partaking of these fruits, the focus of Bikurim was to heighten the people's awareness of Hashem's role in their lives. The benefit was for the giver not the recipient. (Source: Darash Moshe)

הַיּוֹם הַזֶּה ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ מְצַוְךָ לַעֲשׂוֹת אֵת הַחֻקִּים הָאֵלֶּה On this day, Hashem your G-d commands you to perform these laws (26:16)

Although Moshe said this verse to the Jewish people over thirty-three centuries ago we can interpret this verse to have a message for us, "on this day." We are sometimes provided with an opportunity to do a good deed but we lack the enthusiasm to do it "on this day." Perhaps the Torah is instructing us to overcome the lethargy and seize every opportunity to do good. We are therefore advised not to put off a good deed until the next day (Source: Chofetz Chayim - P'ninim MiShulchan Govoha)

Shabbat Shalom



Shabbat starts 7.35pm



Shabbat ends: 8.36pm

The *Insights into the Sedra* sheet is produced by Chazan Anthony Wolfson

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