

KI TAVO - 5776 - THE FIRST FRUITS AND THE SIN OF THE SPIES

Although it would appear from the Torah that all fruits are subject to Bikurim - Rabbinical tradition (Bikurim 1:6) applies it only to the seven fruits associated with the land of Israel. These are enumerated in Devarim 8:8. "It is a land of wheat, barley, grapes, figs and pomegranates - a land of oil-olives and honey dates." The Misva of Bikurim in its initial form as enjoined in Parashat Mishpatim consists of the act of bringing alone. "Bring your first fruits of your land to the house of YHVH your Lord." The Torah curiously waits almost 40 years - (As per the verses at the beginning of our Parasha) to add a declaration requirement. It is counted as an additional Misva incumbent upon the one who brings the Bikurim. He is to recite specific biblical verses which begin with an abbreviated history of the Jewish People and ends with appreciation of our arrival into the land of Israel. Why did the Torah add this additional verbal component? This additional injunction I believe is coming to rectify a sin of the spies occurring almost 39 years prior. Their sin was via their negative speech concerning the land during what I would call the third or the central column Bikurim ceremony of the nation.

BIKURIM AS THE FULFILLMENT OF CREATION

In order to begin to appreciate the importance of Bikurim we will cite two Midrashim. The first (BR 1:4) is a teaching of R. Huna that the universe was created in the merit of the Misva of Bikurim. The second (Tanhuma) teaches that upon seeing that the Temples would be destroyed and the Misva of Bikurim would cease - Moshe Rabbenu established that daily prayer serve as its replacement. We know from the teachings of R. HaAri that the purpose of creation in general and prayer in particular is to serve one ideal. Namely that it is incumbent upon man to elevate the sparks of holiness that descended prior to creation into the lower worlds - back up into their intended proper positions in the world of Asilut. These sparks are related to the seven lower channels of this highest spiritual world. Once they have been elevated and receive their Tikun they will be placed into their proper spiritual positions in order to channel blessings below. The channel of Hesed will be situated on the right; that of Gevurah on the left with the third channel - Tiferet occupying the central column. R. HaAri asserts that each one of these seven fruits is associated spiritually with one of the seven lower channels in the highest spiritual world of Asilut. Wheat with Hesed; Barley with Gevurah and Grapes of the Vine with Tiferet...

THE CEREMONY OF BIKURIM

In light of the idea that the Bikurim represent the sparks that have been elevated to the spiritual land above at the bottom or the basket/vessel level of the world of Asilut - And now are ready to ascend further up and establish the higher channels in the upper world - we should take note of the following. The declaration as detailed in Parashat Ki Tavo represents the prior history of these sparks and of the nation upon whom they depend. This includes the evil intent of Lavan to trap these sparks; the sparks descent to Egypt; their elevation until finally reaching the holy land which has its spiritual parallel as the bottom of the world of Asilut. From there they spring forth (Bikur connotes a forcing out) to elevate further upwards. We are required to place them in a basket and bring them towards the place God will place his name. Upon entering Yerushalayim the laborers of the city must cease work and stand in honor of the new elevated state of the sparks. (Similar to the requirement to stand as we and the sparks enter that level at the start of the Amida). We bring the basket to the kohen who performs in conjunction with the offerer a waving or elevation of the sparks in the form of Bikurim. The basket is placed on the altar and we are taught thereby that the giver has established the spiritual channels allowing him to arouse an outpouring of blessings upon himself and his people.

BIKURIM OF THE NATION - MODEL FOR THE INDIVIDUAL

Furthermore we would like to assert that the individual Misva for an owner to offer these first fruits is in some manner to mimic to some extent the national obligation to bring Bikurim. The Torah clearly defines this national obligation in Vayikra Chapter 23:10. On the 2nd day of Pesah - The Omer or sheaf of barley is offered as the first grain or זבכורים ripen in the spring. It is to be brought to the Kohen for a waving or elevating ceremony. 50 days later on Shavuot the first of the wheat harvest would be taken as זבכורים and baked into loaves. They would also be waved or elevated as sparks by the Kohen prior to being consumed. The Omer Bikurim was to establish the left Column channel of Gevurah and the Two breads Bikurim was to establish the right channel column of Hesed. It appears to me that the central Column (Tiferet) of the nation was to be established on Tish'a Be'av with the Bikurim of the spies. Moshe dispatched the Spies on the 29 Sivan who were to return after 40 days on the 9th of av. In chapter 13 of Parashat Shelah we read Moshe's instructions to the Spies. Since the land of Israel was still in possession of the nations - extracting the Bikurim or sparks associated with Tiferet would prove challenging. Hence Moshe instructs them "and you must have courage and take from the פרי הארץ for the days are associated with the ימי בכורי ענבים - namely the days of the first fruits associated with the Grapes." Verse 23 explains that they did just as instructed even insuring that the Grapes associated with Tiferet would be centered between the left and right channels as its spiritual essence being that of the central column. "They came to the valley of cluster of grapes and they cut down from there a vine with one cluster of grapes and they bore it upon a carrying pole between two and also some of the pomegranates and figs" - The main first fruits being the Grapes with the first fruits associated with the channels Nesah and Hod accompanying them.

DECLARATION AT THE TEMPLE VS THE ONE IN THE MIDBAR

All appeared to go according to plan - The spies were coming back with their Bikure of the Grapes. This event was not merely a reconnaissance mission but rather a crucial step in the redemption of the sparks of creation. A successful outcome might even have ushered in the messianic era and establishing the day of their return as the "Holiday of Tish'a Be'av". Something went wrong - "And they brought out an evil report on the land - The congregation joined in..(14:1) The entire assembly raised its voice. The people commenced crying that night -and we all know the damage that ensued. The Prophet Yirmiya (Lam 1:2) refers to this repeated crying as the true cause of the ninth of Av. It appears to me that the blemish surrounds around their ill advised declaration upon bringing the Grapes to establish the central channel column - or the third Bikurim of the nation. I would venture that the Tikun should be reflective of their blemish in making this improper declaration. Instead of rejoicing in the opportunity to perform the will of the Creator and expressing thanks for the same- they caused a damage that would require generations of Jews to counter this. Hence the urgency of adding a declaration Misva prior to entering the land that revolves around the recognition of thanks for the opportunity the Creator has given us. A proof of our assertion lies in the name given to the declaration in the Mishna (Bikurim 2:2) and Talmud (Yevamot 73) as וידוי ביכורים - The confession of the sin of the first fruit brought by the spies. We are taught that the procession included the masses singing and praising the offerers and their Creator! No doubt this was to rectify the earlier cries of the people in the Midbar. As they would enter the confines of the Temple the Levi'im would burst into song (Tehillim 30:2) Thanking Hashem that the enemies or spiritual husks had not gained access to the sparks and will not rejoice in our downfall.

Shabbat Shalom

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