



# The Marcos and Adina Katz YUTORAH IN PRINT

Ki Savo 5781

## Selihot: First Fruits of the New Year

Rabbi Dr. Norman Lamm z"l (Originally delivered August 29, 1964)

At the beginning of today's Sidra we read of two institutions which were legislated for our ancestors by Moses. The first is the bikkurim, the commandment to bring the first fruit to the Kohen or Priest. The second is the maasrot, the various tithes which were obligatory for the Jew: a tenth of one's income to the Levite every year and, on alternate years, an additional contribution to the poor and underprivileged, and the bringing of one's fruit to Jerusalem and eating them there joyously. There are a number of similarities between bikkurim and maaser. For one thing, both are compulsory contributions. Further, each of them is accompanied by a set recitation. And finally, both of them became effective only upon the entrance of Israel to the Holy Land: *ve'hayah ki tavo el ha-aretz*.

But even more significant than the similarities are the differences between these two great institutions. In introducing the recitation that is to accompany the giving of the tithe or maasrot, the Torah merely says *v'amarta*, "and you shall say." Before the recitation for the bikkurim, however, the Torah prefaces the words *v'anita v'amarta*, "and you shall call out and say." That extra word *v'anita* was interpreted variously by our Rabbis. Thus, they said that the bikkurim are to be brought and the recitation is to be read *be'kol ram*, in a loud voice; whereas the recitation for the maasrot is to be pronounced *be'kol namokh*, in a whisper. Furthermore, the recitation for bikkurim must be *bi'leshon ha-kodesh*, in the Holy Tongue or Hebrew; whereas the maasrot reading may be *be'chol lashon*, in any language. A third difference involves the terminology used: the bikkurim recitation is called *mikra*, a reading or proclamation; whereas the maasrot reading is called *viduy*, which means a confession. And then there is also a historical difference between the two. The bikkurim was offered in the Holy Land as the Temple was in existence.

The reading for the maasrot, however, was interrupted in the middle of the Second Commonwealth by Yohanan, the Kohen Gadol, or High Priest (see last Mishnah, Maasrot).

Why this apparent discrimination favoring bikkurim over maasrot? Why did both Halakhah and history give preference to the institution of first fruits over tithes? Three answers commend themselves.

The first relates to the difference in mood and temperament between these two mitzvot. When a man brought his bikkurim, he spoke of his and his people's low origins. He said, *arami oved avi*, a wandering, or perplexed Syrian was my forefather Jacob. No myth here of being descended from a sun-God! Our ancestors were not great conquerors; instead, we were slaves who were persecuted and driven from one indignity to another. It is only because of God's intervention that we were saved: *va-yotzienu ha-Shem mi-mitzrayim*, it was God who took us out of Egypt. It was only because of Him that we came to this marvelous inheritance of the Land of Israel: *va-yiten lanu et ha-aretz ha-zot*, and He gave us this land. Without the Almighty we would likely as not have remained a slave people, rushed in between the grinding millstones of degenerate Egyptian civilization, so that this day nothing would have been left of us. All of the *mikra bikkurim*, is, therefore, an expression of thankfulness and gratitude based upon the acknowledgement of our own helplessness without God.

The maasrot recitation is in a completely different category. One can easily misunderstand this string of verses as reflecting a sense of complacency and smugness. The donor recites the words *biarti ha-kodesh min ha-bayit*, I have paid all my debts, there is nothing that I owe to anyone. "I have also given them unto the Levite, and unto the stranger, to the orphan and the widow, according to all Thy commandments which Thou has commanded me." I have taken care of my obligations; I have done nothing wrong.

*Asiti ke'khol mitzvotekha*, I am a pious man and I am a good Jew. This was a speech that accompanied the bringing of the maaser. An innocent bystander might have expected that, at this point, the worshipper would remain silent, waiting for a divine pat on the back!

Now, whereas the facts mentioned in this recitation may be true and accurate, it is certainly unbecoming to pronounce them *be'kol ram*, aloud. The facts may be correct; but the publicity given to them is by no means right. The feeling that one has given enough, done enough, observed enough, should remain just that: a feeling, nothing more. Because if this is not kept *be'kol namokh*, to a whisper, but is proclaimed *be'kol ram* in a loud voice, then devoutness degenerates into superciliousness, righteousness into self-righteousness, and piety into pomposity. The mark of the Jew, however, is that he is a *bayshan*, a shame-faced person; we are a unique people whose high morality has often been mistaken for masochism. We have traditionally underplayed our achievements, while publicly acknowledging our guilt and our faults. Our prayers speak of *u-mipnei hata'enu galinu me'artzeu*, we accept the blame upon ourselves for our exile: it was caused by our moral failures. And our Scriptures is largely the record of our failures and insufficiencies. What a contrast to the atmosphere of political conventions, to which we have been subjected these past weeks, in which orator after orator "points with pride" to the virtues of his own party exclusively, and "views with alarm"--exclusively the faults of his opponents!

Perhaps it is time that we Jews in the contemporary era were now mature and bright enough to apply the lessons of the recitation of *bikkurim* to the State of Israel in the kind of image we are trying to present to the world. We may be justifiably proud of Israel's achievements in science and in industry, in security and housing and economics. But instead of publishing this record *be'kol ram*, in a loud voice--"over-exposing" it so that non-Jews will say: Yes, Israel is that country of those inventive and ambitious Jews--the weight and burden of our image, the *kol ram*, ought to be the presentation of Israel as a Land of the Bible, where an ancient divine promise to our forefathers was redeemed in our day. For this is the theme of the *bikkurim*. A holy people never blows its own horn. Indeed, the only time it does so is at the *tekiat shofar*, and the sounding of the *shofar* reminds us of our errors, not our greatness.

A second answer commends itself. It concerns the nature of our religious orientation. The man who brought *bikkurim* expected nothing in return for his pious gesture.

On the contrary, in offering gratitude, he implied that what he had received heretofore was undeserved. Therefore he offered his thanks and expected nothing more--although he might have hoped for it with all his heart.

Contrariwise, the giving of the *maasrot* was concluded by a short prayer, beginning with the words *hashkifah mi'meon kadshekha*, "look forth from Thy holy habitation, from Heaven, and bless Thy people Israel, and the land which Thou has given us..." How easy to misinterpret this beautiful passage as: I have done my duty toward You, O Lord; now it is up to You to reciprocate and do Your duty towards me! I have fulfilled my obligations; now, O God, pay me back. It is the kind of feeling that informs a person who, in conditions of distress and adversity, will complain that he is deserving of much better from God; and when he revels in prosperity and plenty, never entertains the thought that maybe he is undeserving of all this bliss and blessing. Now, it may be just that he is deserving--who are we to judge our fellow man? But while it may be just, it certainly is not authentic piety. A mature religious person does not exact payment from God, just as a mature married couple does not base its life upon an exchange of duties legally exacted and juridically delimited. There is a danger that this concluding prayer of the recitation of the *Maaser* can be misunderstood by the donor as a kind of *quid-pro-quo*, an attempt to strike a bargain with God and demand immediate payment. Compared with the *mikra bikkurim*, the *viduy maaser* can be characterized as a kind of crass commercialism, a deal with the deity. When a man speaks thus, and intends this, it is indeed a *viduy*, a "confession" that he does not understand the Torah and that he does not understand man's destiny in the face of God.

Whereas the recitation for *bikkurim* is called a *mikra*, a proclamation of maturity, because man knows his shortcomings, and appreciates that he deserves nothing, the reading for *maasrot* is *viduy*, a confession of misunderstanding and failure. That is why the *bikkurim* was recited only *bi'leshon ha-kodesh*, in Hebrew, the Holy Tongue; for the entire concept which one enunciated bespeaks a holy wisdom. Whereas the business-like attitude toward God reflected in the *viduy maasrot* is recited *be'khol lashon*, in any language, for it reflects the vulgar jargon of the market-place.

And there is a third and final difference between these two institutions: that is, the difference in timing. The reading for the *maasrot* was done at the end of the third year of the triennial cycle, after all else has been done. Ki

tekhaleh la'aser, when you finish giving your tithes, then you must recite the following. The Maaser itself was offered towards the end of the season; only after all else had been done, then one would give God and His charges their contributions. Now, this is certainly generous--it involves over 10% of a man's earnings--and far better than nothing. But how much greater and more generous of the spirit is the giving of the bikkurim. For even if a man could afford no more than a kol she'hu, even a pittance, still he gave it joyously and enthusiastically: *reshit peri ha-adamah*, the very first fruits, the symbol of a man's achievement, his triumph, and his success were devoted to God, indicating the sense of gladness and joy in which he gave to his Lord.

[Indeed, a Hassidic teacher explained in this manner the difference between Cain and Abel. You recall that the offering of Cain was rejected, whereas the offering of Abel was accepted. Why the difference between them? Our Hassidic Rabbi points to a seemingly irrelevant verse in the Torah: *va-yehi mi-ketz ha-yamim*, and it was at the end of the days that Cain brought his gift to God. Herein lies the difference: Abel brought his gift in the flush of youth, as his first gift; whereas Cain waited to the end of days, after his retirement, after he had made his fortune and taken care of himself and his family. That is why Cain was rejected, while Abel was accepted.]

[It is in the same spirit that the Zohar offers a remarkable interpretation of a famous verse. In the portion of Kedoshim we are commanded *mi-pnei sevah takum*, "before a hoary head thou shalt rise." This means, as is its literal intent, that we are to rise in respect for an older person. But the Zohar adds another interpretation to the word *mi-pnei*. It means, the Zohar says, not only "in front of" spiritually, but "before" chronologically. In other words, before you yourself have developed a hoary head, before you turn gray and old, it is time for you to rise in your Jewishness, in your service of God! It is, of course, always time to return to the Almighty, no matter how old one is. But how much greater and better when we return, not after retirement, but while still young and strong and virile.]

## Beginnings

Rabbi Joshua (*The Hoffer*) Hoffman z"l

**T**his week's parsha begins with the mitzvoh of bringing one's bikkurim, or first fruits, to the Temple, and expressing thanks to God for achieving this milestone. Included in the expression of

Rabbi Yitzhak Arama, the author of *Akedat Yitzhak*, informs us that it is for this reason that all our major prayers are offered at the beginning of different parts of the day. Thus, shaharit is prayed at the beginning of the day time; maariv at the beginning of the night, as the stars come out; minhah at the beginning of the afternoon; and the tikkun hatzot which David first offered and which especially the mystics later recited, is offered at the beginning of the day according to those who reckon from midnight to midnight.

These, then, are the three reasons why the bikkurim were more cherished and emphasized. And all these three are present and stressed in the Selihot prayer which we shall recite tonight. They are, for one thing, the very opposite of self-righteousness. For we shall say at the very beginning of our Selihot service, *lekhah ha-Shem ha-tzedakah, ve'lanu boshet ha-panim--you, O Lord, are just, whereas any special favors: lo be'hessed ve'lo be'maasim banu le'anekeha*, we do not come before Thee boasting of great deeds or great acts of love on our part. And, instead of a business-like trade, we announce *ki al rahamekha ha-rabim anu betuhim*, we can rely not upon our deeds, but only upon Thy great mercies. And finally, as the same Rabbi Yitzhak Arama tells us, the Selihot too are offered at the beginning--at the beginning of the season when the nights grow longer, so that *u-mah nai'm she'yaavod ha-El me-rishito... kedei she'tevorakh la-hem melekhet ha-lelot kulam*, how pleasant it is for man to serve God at the beginning of this time of the lengthening nights, devoting them to prayer and supplication, so that thereby all the nights of the year may be sanctified and hallowed.

As the old year draws to a close and a new year is about to begin, ushered in by the Selihot prayers, may we learn to approach our maker, the God of Israel, in the true humility and in the spirit of gratitude of the bikkurim. And may we be privileged to fulfill especially the concluding words of the mikra bikkurim: *ve'samahta be'chol ha-tov asher natan lekha ha-Shem Elokeha u-le'vetekha* "and you shall be happy in all the goodness that the Lord Thy God has given thee, and thy household." Amen.

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thanks is a recitation of the section of the Torah beginning with the words, "Arami oveid avi," variously translated as 'my father was a wandering Aramean,' or 'an Aramean tried to destroy my father.' In either case, this section

relates, in short, the descent of Ya'akov's family to Egypt, and the emergence of the bnei Yisroel from that country as a people redeemed by God. This section, in fact, forms the basis of the Haggadah that is recited on the night of the Passover Seder. We have discussed, in the past, the relevance of this section in connection with the bringing of one's first fruits. However, based on a theme that we mentioned in last week's message, I would like to re-explore this issue, and present an expanded explanation.

We mentioned last week that even according to all opinions in the Talmud, it is legitimate, in regard to the book of Devorim, to expound halochos based on the juxtaposition of different laws to each other in the text of the Torah. Many commentators have gone the further step of deriving more homiletic - type messages from such juxtapositions. In this week's parsha, some commentators note the juxtaposition of the mitzvoh of bikkurim to the last mitzvos in parshas Ki Seitzei, those of remembering what Amaleik did to us when we came out of Egypt, in order to arouse us to action and wipe out that nation. Ibn Ezra writes that in connection with the mitzvos of remembering and wiping Amaleik in order to wipe it out, the Torah says, "And it shall be that when the Lord, your God, gives you rest from all your enemies all around, in the land that the Lord, your God, gives you as an inheritance to take possession of it, you shall wipe out the remembrance of Amaleik from under the heaven - you shall not forget" (Devorim 25: 19). In contrast to this requirement of resting from all our enemies, which is a prerequisite for waging battle against Amaleik, the Torah then tells us that the mitzvoh of bikkurim requires only that we enter the land, inherit it and take possession of it. In practical terms, this means that the mitzvoh was operative after the seven initial years of conquering the land and an additional seven years of dividing the captured sections among the various tribes. The Chizkuni takes a similar approach to the juxtaposition, but expands the contrast to include many of the mitzvos that follow in parshas KiSavo, as well. Rabbeinu Ya'akov ben Asher, in his commentary Ba'al HaTurim, reaches a somewhat different conclusion from the juxtaposition of these mitzvos. He says that the mitzvoh of bikkurim is dependent on the nation entering Eretz Yisroel, and Amaleik sought to prevent them from entering. For this reason, he adds, the farmer who brings his first fruits to the Temple recites the section of 'Arami oveid avi,' because it refers to Lavan, the Aramean who sought to destroy Ya'akov, our father, by trying to prevent

him from returning to Eretz Yisroel with his family, just as Amaleik later tried to do to the entire nation.

While the approach of the Ba'al HaTurim is somewhat technical, focusing on the relation of the various mitzvos to the presence of the Jewish nation in Eretz Yisroel, other commentators make a more essential connection. They point out that just as Amaleik is referred to as 'reishis goyim' - the first among the nations' (Bamidbar 24:20) - so, too, bikkurim is referred to, in parshas Ki Savo, as 'reishis kol pri ha-adamah' - the first of every fruit of the ground (Devorim 26:2). Rav Moshe Shapiro, as presented in MiMa'amakim by his student, Rabbi Alexander Aryeh Mandelbaum, and somewhat differently in a taped address on this topic, notes this connection, and adds that the Jewish nation is also referred to as 'reishis,' in a verse in Yirmiyahu (2:3) - "Yisroel is holy to the Lord, the first fruits of His increase. The midrash, in fact, based on this verse, says that the world was created 'bereishis,' in the beginning, in the merit of Yisroel, which is called reishis, and in the merit of bikkurim, which are called reishis. The idea being expressed here, explains Rabbi Shapiro, is that God's presence in the world is hidden, and the Jewish people help make His presence discernable, by recognizing His hand at work behind the scenes. By expressing gratitude to God for the first fruits that they produce in Eretz Yisroel, they are acknowledging that it is God Who created the world and is behind the workings of nature. Amaleik, on the other hand, denies that God created the world and works within it. The Torah says of Amaleik, 'Amaleik is the first of nations, and its end is destruction.'" Rabbi Shapiro explains that Amaleik considers itself the beginning and end of history, and, therefore, will, ultimately, be destroyed. Yisroel, however, by proclaiming that the true 'reishis' is God, constitutes a beginning that has a story that follows, the entire history of the universe, as orchestrated by God. Although Rabbi Shapiro does not say this, perhaps we can add that for this reason, when the farmer brings his first fruits, his 'reishis,' to the Temple, he recapitulates the account of the exile and redemption of the Jewish nation, to emphasize that God is the true 'reishis,' the Creator and controller of the world.

Rav Ya'akov Moshe Charlop, in his Mei Marom to parshas Ki Savo (no. 47), also notes the connection between Amaleik as reishis, and bikkurim and Yisroel as reishis, but in a different way than does Rabbi Shapiro. Rabbi Chaim ben Attar points out in his commentary Ohr HaChaim that parshas Ki Savo begins with the words, "And

it will be when you enter the land” (Devorim 26:1). The Hebrew word for the expression “and it will be” is ‘vehaya,’ and the Talmud teaches us that whenever the word ‘vhaya’ is used in Scripture, it implies a situation of simcha, of joy. What kind of joy is involved in this section of the Torah? Rav Charlop writes that true joy comes through a sense of renewal, of awareness that everything in the world is constantly being renewed by God, Who created it. Only the Jewish people, as God’s nation, understands this, and only in Eretz Yisroel, which is under God’s constant special providence, can it be truly recognized. The task of the Jewish nation is to teach this truth to all the nations of the world. Amaleik, on the other hand, denies God’s creation of the world, and believes that everything is old, and run solely through the laws of nature. In order to promote its view of the world, Amaleik constantly tries to prevent Yisroel’s from entering Eretz Yisroel. When the nation does enter, and merits the first fruits of their land, they bring them to the Temple in a joyous ceremony, as described at length in the third chapter of Mishneh Bikkurim. Because of the great joy involved in bringing the bikkurim, through the recognition of God’s constant renewal of the universe, the Torah ends the section by saying, “ And you shall

rejoice with all the good that the Lord your God has given to you - you and the Levite and the convert who is in your midst” (Devorim 26:11). Rabbi Charlop’s explanation of the connection between the end of Ki Seitzei and the beginning of Ki Savo thus incorporates both the approach of the Ba’al HaTurim, who points to the element of Eretz Yisroel, and the approach of Rabbi Shapiro, who points to the element of ‘reishis.’

Based on Rabbi Charlop’s approach to the juxtaposition of the end of Ki Seitzei to the beginning of Ki Savo, we can understand why the farmer recites the paragraph of ‘Arami oveid avi’ when he brings his first fruits to the Temple. Since this mitzvoh emphasizes God’s constant renewal of the world, the farmer must recapitulate the historical experience of the nation, and thereby come to a renewed understanding of all the goodness that God has bestowed, and continues to bestow, on them. Just as God renews the universe on a constant basis, so, too, the Jewish people, as his nation, bears within itself the ability of self-renewal, and, as a result, carries the obligation to constantly renew its relationship with God. May we all, in this month of self-introspection, achieve a renewed relationship with God, and merit a wonderful new year.

## Do Mention It

*Rabbi Assaf Bednarsh (Transcribed and adapted by a talmid from the YUTorah shiur originally given in the Gruss Kollel in Yerushalayim on Sep 22, 2016 )*

**A**t the beginning of Parshas Ki Savo, we have a parsha of Mikra Bikurim. It tells us that a farmer in Eretz Yisroel has to bring the Bikurim to the Beis Hamikdash. Once there, he makes a declaration in front of a Kohen: *Higad’ti ha-yom la-Hashem Elokecha ki basi el ha-aretz asher nishba Hashem la-avoseinu laseis lanu.* I declare today to Hashem, your G-d, that I came to the land that Hashem swore to our forefathers that He would give us. I have come to the promised land. And Rashi adds: *She-eincha k’fui tova.* He says this to show that he is not an ingrate. You say this because you appreciate the good that was done to you.

I found this Rashi to be peculiar. It’s a great idea! Of course, we should appreciate the good things and shouldn’t be a *k’fui tova*. But what does it have to do with these particular words: *ve-amarta eilav, higad’ti ha-yom la-Hashem Elokecha?* So much of the Torah’s content is about not being *k’fui tova*. It says: *ve-achalta, ve-savata, u-verachta es Hashem Elokecha al ha’aretz hatova asher nasan lach.*

Half the Chumash is about appreciating those things that Hashem does for us—that’s the yesod of life. So why davka here does Rashi point this out more than any other pasuk in the Chumash?

Perhaps Rashi is trying to answer a fundamental problem in this pasuk. This is a declaration. You get up and make a whole speech. And later, there is a second part, where you say: *Arami oved avi—Va-yeired Mitzrayma—Va-yagar sham bi-mtei me’at.* You go back many generations in Jewish history, as far back as Yakov and Lavan, the Avos, and Yetzias Mitzrayim—to the events that happened a long time ago. There is a chidush here. Some people forgot what happened a long time ago, going back thousands of years. So occasionally, we need a chazara. You should know that even though you were not there, even though it happened long before you were born, we were slaves to Pharaoh, and Hashem saved us. There are a lot of things one could say that have chidushim. I can get up and say: You should know that everything we have comes from Hashem.

When you see some fruit on the tree, it's really Hashem who makes it grow. Some people are not so educated and don't know that. So we have to tell them. That's a chidush for them. Most of the time, things we say have a chidush about the importance of Hashem in our lives that is not obvious. But what does the fellow say here? Higad'ti hayom la-Hashem—I am declaring to Hashem. This sounds like a very important statement. And he continues, *Ki basi el ha-aretz asher nishba Hashem la-avoseinu laseis lanu*. I came to the land. I have to say that I am in Eretz Yisroel. What do you mean?? He is standing in Eretz Yisroel. This fellow grew food in Eretz Yisroel. He brought it to Beis Hamikdash in Yerushalayim—in Eretz Yisroel. And what is his fancy statement? I made it! I am in Eretz Yisroel! Obviously, he is in Eretz Yisroel. I am not going to stand up and say: I have a very important announcement to make. I am in the Beis Hamedrash now. Obviously. I am right here! All he is saying is obvious, trivial, and seemingly not worth saying. I am in Eretz Yisroel—where he obviously is. That's the question on the pasuk that Rashi is trying to answer. And the answer is that you might have an unwarranted hava amina that you don't have to state obvious things—it's pointless. But this hava amina is wrong. Why do you have to say it? Not because it's a chidush. In his comment “*She-eincha k'fui tova*”, Rashi gives us a psychological insight. Why would someone become a k'fui tova? Why would I not appreciate the good that people do for me?

## Hashem Hears Our Cries

Mrs. Michal Horowitz

This week's parsha, Parshas Ki Savo, opens with the mitzvah of Bikurim: The first fruits of the Shivat Ha'Minin (see Devarim 8:8), which are brought by the farmer up to the Beis Ha'Mikdash in Yerushalayim (Devarim 26:1-11). Upon bringing up his fruits, the landowner recites a beautiful and moving passage, which has become the crux of the Haggadah Shel Pesach.

Amongst the verses recited, the farmer declares words that are very familiar, as they are recited annually on leil ha'Seder:

אַרְמֵי אֲבֹד אָבִי, וַיֵּרֶד מִצְרַיִם, וַיְגַר שָׁם בְּמִתֵּי מֵעֵט; וַיְהִי-שָׁם, לְגוֹי  
גָדוֹל עֲצוּם וְרָב.

*An Aramean [sought to] destroy my forefather, and he went down to Egypt and sojourned there with a small number of people, and there became a great, mighty, and numerous nation; and there came to us the Egyptians, and we were brought into slavery.*

Not because I am some evil person who doesn't believe in appreciating favors. Very simple. Because I take it for granted. Since it's so obvious that I don't even have to mention it, I don't have to think about it—which means I don't appreciate it. Why are people *k'fui tova* to their parents or spouses? Why are people *k'fui tova* to Hashem? Not because they made a mistake or came to the wrong conclusion. It's because you get so used to it that you take it for granted, and therefore you don't appreciate it anymore. And that's exactly what Rashi is telling us in this pasuk. Our ancestors, the Jewish farmers in Eretz Yisroel did, and *be'ezras Hashem*—*she-yibane Beis Hamikdash be-meheira be-yameinu*—we will have to get up and say: It's obvious that I am in Eretz Yisroel! I was born in Eretz Yisroel. This is where I live. It's so obvious. But I have to say it anyway because I don't take for granted that I live here. I appreciate it because it isn't obvious that it's a gift from Hashem. And I am stating this now to let the world know that I am not a k'fui tova. Rashi is not only giving us the yesod of Bikurim here but also a yesod in life. Instead of saying it's so obvious that I don't need to mention it, say I DO need to mention it—to make sure that I don't take it for granted. I appreciate all the goodness that Hashem bestowed upon me, even though it's obvious. It wasn't pashut that I would receive it. It's chesed that I have it, and I appreciate it.

And the Egyptians did bad to us and afflicted us, and they imposed hard labor upon us;

וַנַּעֲשֶׂה, אֵל-ה' אֱלֹקֵי אֲבוֹתֵינוּ; וַיִּשְׁמַע ה' אֶת-קוֹלנוּ, וַיֵּרָא אֶת-עַנְיֵנוּ  
וְאֶת-עַמְלֵנוּ וְאֶת-לְחֻצְנוּ.

*And we cried out to Hashem, the G-d of our fathers, and Hashem heard our voice and saw our affliction, our travail, and our oppression (Devarim 26:5-7).*

אֶת-עַנְיֵנוּ וְאֶת-עַמְלֵנוּ וְאֶת-לְחֻצְנוּ.

Each of these terms of affliction and oppression refers to a different maltreatment by the Egyptians to our forefathers.

In *Peninim on the Torah* (Eleventh Series), Rabbi A.L. Scheinbaum writes, “Chazal teach us that each of the above mentioned terms refers to another form of persecution. עַנְיֵנוּ, our affliction, refers to the disruption of family life; עַמְלֵנוּ, our travail, refers to the children being thrown into

the river; and לְחַצְּנוּ, our oppression, refers to the extreme pressure the Egyptians exerted upon us.

“If this is the case, why are the persecutions not mentioned in the previous pasuk, immediately following the phrase, וַיַּעֲנוּנוּ, וַיִּרְעוּ אֵתנוּ הַמִּצְרִים, And the Egyptians did bad to us and afflicted us? Why are these three terms of affliction mentioned only after we are told that Hashem listened to our pleas?

“In a homily delivered before Rosh Hashanah 1941, during the tragic and painful days that marked European Jewry’s meeting with the angel of death, the Piaszecner Rebbe zt”l, HY”D (Rabbi Kalonymus Kalman Shapira, also known as the Aish Kodesh, 1889-1943), lamented and said, ‘We see now that we do not feel each pain and sorrow to the extent that we once felt, even for little irritations. If, indeed, we were now to feel all the pain inherent in a tragic situation with the sensitivity and severity which we once experienced, it would be impossible to exist for even a single day. The simple explanation for this is, as Chazal say, ‘The decayed flesh of a living person does not feel the knife.’ The only thing we feel is that our selfhood is being trampled upon; the world has turned dark and bleak; there is no day, no night, just turmoil and confusion. It seems as if the whole world weighs upon us, pressing down and crushing, to the breaking point... so that consequently, we do not feel the uniqueness of each tragedy in accordance with its true dimensions.”

How does this relate to our passage in the parsha, and how does this explain that the pasuk says Hashem saw our affliction, travail and oppression, only after the Torah tells us that Hashem heard voice?

Answers Rabbi Scheinbaum “In other words, Klal Yisrael was numb; they were numb with extreme pain. They could no longer feel each and every affliction. Hashem, however, did feel the pain. When He heard their cry, He knew fully well every single affliction which they had suffered. How important this lesson is for us. Some

## Two, Not Three

Rabbi Moshe Taragin

**W**e weren’t just chosen by Hashem. In addition to selecting Avraham for grand mission, Hashem, forged a historical Covenant with him. This everlasting and unbreakable Covenant is invulnerable to human betrayal. The Covenant cannot be shattered but if, violated, harsh consequences await

individuals undergo much pain and affliction. It is almost as if they have become numb to their suffering because they have suffered so much. Hashem does not forget. He feels everything and will take it all into consideration in the final analysis” (*Peninim on the Torah, Eleventh Series, p.344-345*).

As we read Parshas Ki Savo and end 5781, we pray that the teaching of Chazal - let the year and its curses end - come to fruition in our day and time, and that 5782 is more peaceful, calmer and healthy for all. In a world torn asunder - by the still-raging COVID pandemic and its variants, by wildfires and accursed arson fires in our beloved Land, by the Meron tragedy and the Karlin Shavuot tragedy, by the political situation in Eretz Yisrael and around the world, and the recent horrific and shocking murder of ha’bachur Shmuli Silverberg z”l, a talmid who was learning in the Denver yeshiva - we risk becoming numb to the pain, bewilderment and afflictions of exile.

The navi tells us that in the end of days:

וְנָתַתִּי לָכֶם לֵב חָדָשׁ, וְרוּחַ חֲדָשָׁה אֶתֶן בְּקִרְבְּכֶם; וְהִסַּרְתִּי אֶת-לֵב הָאֲבָן, מִבְּשָׁרְכֶם, וְנָתַתִּי לָכֶם, לֵב בָּשָׂר -

*And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit will I put within you, and I will take away the heart of stone out of your flesh, and I will give you a heart of flesh (Yechezkel 36:26).*

Rav Simcha Wasserman zt”l explains that the heart of stone is a Divine gift, enabling us to endure the pain and nisyonos of exile. It will only be in the end of days, with the ultimate redemption, that Hashem will remove our heart of stone and give us a heart of flesh.

However, even if - in order to survive - we need a heart of stone, and at times we become numb to the waves of pain that would otherwise threaten to overtake us, the Torah teaches us that the RS”O is never immune to our tears, He is never deaf to our cries and He is never blind to our suffering. Even if we don’t feel it, He does.

May our nation and our Land merit a shana tova u’me’suka - a year that is only good and always sweet.

us. Twice, the Torah delineates the repercussions for disobeying our Covenant with Hashem. One “tochacha” section is inserted in the end of sefer Vaykira while the second one appears toward the end of sefer Devraim. Sadly, these nightmarish scenes materialized in the wake of our unremitting insubordination.

The book of Devarim is nicknamed “mishneh Torah” as it reviews and summarizes the earlier books. A review of the torah would be incomplete without a restatement of the terrifying details of the tochacha. However, there are significant discrepancies between the first tochacha of Vayikra and the review in Devarim. These signature differences convinced the Ramban that these accounts actually refer to two very different historical events. The earlier tochacha in Vayikra details the first exile while the latter segment in Devarim portrays the terrible disaster of the second exile.

One salient difference is the emphasis placed in the first tochacha, upon the sin of paganism. Tragically, pagan culture and idolatry ran rampant in the first Temple era, but was less widespread during the second Temple era. Evidently, the tochacha in Vayikra which attributes our exile to unbridled pagan worship must be depicting the first exile.

Conversely, the tochacha of Devarim chronicles a military invasion of a foreign and unfamiliar enemy, landing in Israel as “an eagle from afar”. As these conquering armies speak a confusing language, they are even more frightening. The first mikdash, however, was destroyed by a very familiar adversary. The Babylonians-our former allies- inhabited lands to the North of Israel and spoke an Aramaic which most Jews were conversant in. The Romans were a previously unknown army and struck a new form of terror in the hearts of the Jews. Suddenly, endless legions of Roman soldiers arrived on ships – as an eagle from a far-away land. Ironically, they carried the emblem of a bald eagle upon their weapons and their banners.

Additionally, the second tochacha describes the Jews being shipped out of Israel upon the high seas. The route from Yerushalayim to Babylonia doesn’t include any ocean journeys. Traveling to Rome, of course, entails being loaded as slaves and relocated over the Mediterranean sea. The details of the second tochacha are more consistent with the destruction of the second mikdash.

A final signal that Devarim refers to the second exile

is the Torah’s description of our hideous and almost mindboggling suffering: we will become crazed from the sights we behold! The Babylonian exile lasted only 70 years and didn’t entail extraordinary or prolonged suffering. After the trauma of the initial destruction of the mikdash, the Jews landed in Babylonia and Persia and enjoyed relatively stable lives. In fact, life in Babylonia became too comfortable. Seventy years later Ezra invited the Jews to return and to rebuild Yerushalayim, but tragically, only 42,000 answered his call. The first exile wasn’t gruesome and didn’t match the grotesque imagery of the Devarim tochacha.

By contrast, the Jewish odyssey of the past 1900 years has been brutal and fierce. We have been ported from continent to continent and, sadly, have weathered persecution, hatred and discrimination. It is difficult to read the dreadful scenes of the Devarim tochacha without thinking about the nightmare of the Holocaust. The horrors of the second tochacha match the sad reality of our long exile.

This fascinating analysis of the Ramban discloses a crucial message about Jewish redemption. Each tochacha is tagged to a different Jewish exile. Essentially, the Torah only lists two exiles. Evidently, - if there is no third tochacha- there will be no third exile. That aspect of history has already concluded.

We have returned from the long exile described in Devarim. So many people are troubled by the question of whether our return to Israel is Divinely redemptive. How do we know it is a historical shift and not merely geopolitical dynamics or some other historical escapade? The Ramban’s breakdown assures us that there will never be a third exile. Perhaps, our arrival in the land will be occasioned by struggle. Perhaps, the route to final redemption will be rocky and uneven. Perhaps, our greatest dreams may not fully be rapidly achieved. However, the masses of Jews who return home will not be exiled again. We are home to stay..

## A Contemporary Interpretation of an Ancient Reproof

*Rabbi Ephraim Z. Buchwald*

**T**his week’s parasha, parashat Kee Tavo, is one of two parashiot in the Torah that are known as the To’h’cha’cha, G-d’s reproof of the Jewish people. The To’h’cha’cha contains the threat of ominous Divine

afflictions and terrifying calamities that will befall the Jewish people if they fail to heed G-d’s directions.

According to many commentators, the first To’h’cha’cha, which is found in parashat Bechukotai (Leviticus 26),

predicts the destruction of the First Temple, while the prophecies of the second To'h'cha'cha of parashat Kee Tavo were fulfilled with the destruction of the Second Temple.

The To'h'cha'cha always begins with blessings, extensive blessings from G-d, who waits patiently for His people to repent. Only then, are we informed of the ominous threats and the foreboding evil that awaits Israel if they fail to heed G-d's word.

When the To'h'cha'cha is read in the synagogue, most contemporary listeners assume that the words are intended for ancient people, since they were spoken to the Israelites of old. But that is hardly true. The cogent words, have profound contemporary meaning for today's Jews as well, as we will attempt to show.

It is the style of the Torah to always open with the positive. In Deuteronomy 28:1, we read: וְהָיָה אִם שָׁמַעְתָּ תְּשָׁמַעַתְּ בְּקוֹל ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ, *And, it shall come to pass, if you will listen diligently to the voice of the L-rd, your G-d, to observe and do all His commandments, which I commanded you this day, that the L-rd, your G-d will set you high above all the nations of the earth.*

G-d promises that His divine blessings will be showered upon the people of Israel. The Jewish people will be blessed both in the city and blessed in the field. Says Moses to Israel in the name of G-d: The food of your body will be blessed, as will the food of your land. The food of your cattle, and the increase of your flock will be blessed, as well as your basket and your kneading trough. You will be blessed when you come in, and when you go out. Your enemies, who rise up against you, will be defeated, and although they approach you from a single direction, they will flee from before you seven ways. There will be blessings in the barns, and blessings upon everything you touch. The land will be blessed. And G-d will make you a Holy people. As a result, all the people on earth will see that the name of G-d has been called upon you, and they will fear you.

G-d's magnanimous blessings of Israel continue. You will be overabundant for good, for children, for cattle, for the fruit of the land. G-d will open His good treasure—the heavens, and give you rain in its proper season and bless the work of your hands. You will lend to many nations, but never borrow. G-d will make you the head, and not the tail. You will be above always, and never beneath—if only you heed the commandments of G-d, to observe and do them.

The blessings conclude and, in Deuteronomy 28:15, the message turns ominous. וְהָיָה אִם לֹא תִשְׁמַע בְּקוֹל ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ,

*And it shall come to pass, if you fail to listen to the voice of the Lord, your G-d, to observe and do all His commandments and His statutes that I command you this day, that all these curses shall come upon you and overtake you. You will be cursed in the city, and cursed in the field, cursed in the basket, and cursed in your kneading trough. The fruit of your body will be cursed, as well as the fruit of your land, and the increase of your flock. You'll be cursed when you go in and cursed when you go out. A pestilence will cling to you and will consume you from off the land that G-d gives you to possess it.*

The Torah continues, warning the Jewish people that they will be smitten with all sorts of diseases, inflammations, fiery heat and drought. You'll be smitten by your enemies, and you'll be a horror to the kingdoms of the earth. Your carcasses will be food unto the fowl of the air and the beasts of the earth, and there will be no one to frighten them away. You'll be exiled to a land whose language you don't understand, and you'll become an astonishment, a proverb and a byword among the people there.

The stranger that is in your midst will rise up above you and you'll be lower and lower. He'll lend to you, but you won't lend to him. He'll be the head, and you'll be the tail. And you will be left few in number. Why? Because you did not listen to the voice of the L-rd, your G-d.

The L-rd will scatter you among all peoples from one end of the earth even to the other, and you'll serve other gods. In the morning you will say, "I wish it were evening," and in the evening you will say, "I wish it were morning," for the fear of your heart that will always preoccupy you.

Finally, in Deuteronomy 28:69, the Torah concludes, "These are the words of the covenant which the Lord commanded Moses to make with the children of Israel in the land of Moab, beside the covenant which He made with them in Choreb."

It all sounds exceedingly frightening, and it surely is. But it's even more frightening when we look closely at the details of these ancient words and realize how readily they apply to contemporary reality.

Deuteronomy 28:16: "Cursed shall you be in the city and cursed shall you be in the field." There will be extensive urban decay. Metropolitan centers will begin to crumble, and if you attempt to escape to the suburbs, you will encounter vast environmental blight there as well. Verse 17: "Your basket and your kneading trough will be cursed." Countries that previously produced unlimited supplies of food, will uncharacteristically, be attacked by blight and drought and

will be unable to produce enough supplies even for their own needs, let alone, have sufficient supplies for export. Financial and stock markets will tank, industries will crumble, corruption will abound.

Verse 18: *“Cursed shall be the fruit of your body and the fruit of your land.”* Your children will be seduced by violence and drugs. Teenage crime will skyrocket. Adolescence will be a lost phase of childhood, and record numbers of youngsters will die of opioid overdoses and random gun violence committed by hordes of lawless gangs.

Verse 19: *“Cursed shall you be when you come in, and cursed shall you be when you go out.”* People become so disoriented that they will not know whether they’re coming-or-going. They will innocently leave their homes to go shopping, to go to work or to school, only to be confronted by homicidal mass murderers, and violent psychopaths. Verse 20: *“The L-rd will send upon you a curse and discomfiture, and rebuke.”* Society will be on the verge of anarchy. Crime rates, which had been reduced, will rise to the bad-old-days levels. More than two million Americans will be locked up in prisons, the highest rate of any advanced country. In some neighborhoods, adult males will hardly be seen, because so many have been murdered or incarcerated. At the same time, violent criminals will be released without bail.

Verse 22: *“G-d will smite you with consumption, with fever and with inflammation, and with drought.”* There will be epidemics of new diseases such as AIDS and COVID-19, that will not respond to conventional treatments. Verse 23: *“And your heaven that is over your head, shall be brass, and the earth that is under you shall be iron.”* Global warming will wreak havoc on the environment. Indifferent citizens and governments will continue to emit heavy amounts of carbon, and other emissions that deplete the ozone layer. They will contaminate the environment with pesticides, PCBs, and other pollutants. Our air, oceans and sea life will be contaminated with dangerous levels of microscopic plastic particles. Polluted land areas will become common. Verse 24: *“The L-rd will make the rain of your land powder and dust.”* There will be radon contamination, acid rain and unprecedented heat and drought. The once-fertile lands of the “Bread basket” regions will turn into powder, millions of fertile acres and beautiful forests will be consumed by the extraordinary heat and uncontrolled wildfires.

Verse 29: *“And you shall grope at noon, as a blind gropes in darkness.”* People will be groping, looking for purpose

in life. Even the rich, will not know what to do with their time. Large numbers of people will be lonely and depressed and become dependent on pills and an army of therapists. *“You shall not make your ways prosperous, and you shall be only oppressed and robbed always, and there shall be none to save you.”* Rising crime will fill citizens with fear. Security guards will be stationed throughout formerly safe communities. No one will pay attention any longer to ringing burglar alarms. Criminals will hack your computers and bank accounts. Companies will be frozen by ransomware. Home security systems will become more and more sophisticated, people will move to gated communities for additional protection. Looters will attack the high-end shopping malls, claiming the property as theirs for injustices done to them in the past. Personal valuables will have to be kept so secured, that wearing or using them will prove terribly inconvenient.

Verse 30: *“You shall betroth a wife, and another man shall lie with her.”* Sexual standards will collapse, infidelity will be rampant. Divorce rates will significantly decline because people will marry later, and two-parent families will become increasingly uncommon. *“You’ll build a house and you shall not dwell therein, you’ll plant a vineyard and you shall not use the fruit thereof.”* The economy will founder. Personal bankruptcy and business dissolution will become de rigueur. Your property will be foreclosed. Verse 31: *“Your ox shall be slain before your eyes.”* Your SUVs, your Lexuses, your luxury vehicles will be stolen, at times even hijacked with their drivers, or taken away by the bill collectors.

Perhaps, most ominous of all, verse 41: *“You shall beget sons and daughters, but they shall not be yours, for they shall go into captivity.”* Rampant assimilation–intermarriage will become the norm for the Jewish people.

And why does this all happen? Verse 47: *תַּחַת אֲשֶׁר לֹא יָרַב לְבָב, מְרַב כָּל עֲבֹדָתְךָ אֶת הַשֵּׁם אֱלֹהֵיךָ בְּשִׂמְחָה, וּבְטוֹב לֵבָב, מְרַב כָּל*. *Because you did not serve the L-rd, your G-d with joyfulness and with gladness of heart, by reason of abundance of all things! As absurd as it seems, prosperity is often as great a challenge as is poverty. As Jews succeed materially, they increasingly walk away from G-d. They forget to say, “Thank You,” to the Ultimate Provider.*

Verse 49: *“The L-rd will bring a nation against you from far, from the end of the earth as the vulture swoops down, a nation whose tongue you shall not understand, a nation of fierce countenance that did not regard the person of the old nor show favor to the young.”* There’ll be a lack of

communication, not only between the conqueror and the conquered, but even between generations. An enormous “generation gap” will develop, parents will be unable to speak to children and children will be unable to speak to parents. The result will be, verse 53: “*And you shall eat the fruit of your own body, the flesh of your sons and daughters whom the L-rd, thy G-d has given you.*” Not only will there be lack of communication, not only will there be absentee parents and children “nuking” frozen meals for dinner 6 or 7 nights a week. Not only will nannies raise the children and children be virtually unaware of their biological parents, but there will be rampant child abuse and child exploitation. Parents will be replaced by (mostly-violent) video games, and iPad baby sitters.

As we read Deuteronomy 28, it becomes increasingly impossible not to see the evils of contemporary society not only predicted, but actually fulfilled.

But it doesn't have to be this way! These evils should

## On the Religious Establishment

Rabbi Adam Friedmann

**T**he parshah opens by describing the mitzvah of bikkurim: A farmer brings the first products of his harvest to the Beit HaMikdash and presents them to the kohen. He then traces the history of those fruits from the exile in Egypt, through the redemption, entering the land, and up to growing the tree. This is a deeply personal moment in which the farmer gives voice to his direct re-relationship with G-d as it arises from his life experiences. (Devarim 26:1-11)

The Torah expresses this personal relationship a little later in the par-shah: “Today you have declared (he'emarta) Hashem to be your G-d, and to follow in his ways, keep His laws and commandments, and listen to His voice.” (ibid. 26:17) Rabbi Av-raham ibn Ezra (ad loc.), citing Rabbi Yehudah Halevi, explains that the word he'emarta is a declaration which arises from a relationship. G-d's ac-tions toward us revealed such moral greatness that we respond by declar-ing, “This is my G-d.” The farmer stands in his field, sees his successful crop, and experiences a private mo-ment of closeness to G-d. The Torah demands that the farmer concretize these feelings by publically declaring them in the Temple in front of the ko-hen who serves “in those days.” (Devarim 26:3) The precise sig-nificance of “in those days” is debated by Rashi and Ramban.

Rashi (ad loc.) explains that the words “in those days”

never happen, and we can forestall it. We can prevent these ominous events by merely acknowledging G-d and expressing our gratitude for G-d's abundant blessings. We need to put prosperity in its proper perspective and make certain that our most precious possessions, our children, are properly educated in the ways of G-d. We need to open our homes generously, and conduct our lives with justice, and fulfill our responsibilities with loving-kindness. We need to repent.

We need to feel that these days of Elul are a Divine gift, an antidote to the To'h'cha'cha, the reproof, and a healing for the curses and calamities. We need not suffer. G-d has given us the formula to counteract the suffering. Therefore, G-d begs us, beseeches us, Deuteronomy 30:19, to “choose life.” וּבְחַרְתָּ בַּחַיִּים, Choose life!

There's no more propitious time to “choose life” than now! Choose life! Choose spiritual abundance! Choose peace! Choose health! Choose happiness! Choose G-d.

are an insistence to bring the first fruits to the kohen regardless of his stature. Even if the kohanim of a particular generation are substandard, the commandment re-mains in place. This is similar to anoth-er commandment earlier in Devarim (17:9). Someone seeking judgment should not hesitate on the basis that the judges of his day are at a lower level than those of previous generations. He must submit to the judges who are ac-tive “in those days”.

Ramban (ibid. 26:3) rejects the compari-son between judges and kohanim. We can understand the concerns of some-one seeking judgment; if the judges of his day lack knowledge and skill they may fail to properly handle the case. Kohanim, however, serve the purely functional role of carrying out the ser-vice in the Temple. Their personal at-tributes have no bearing on the service's success. Why would anyone be con-cerned about it?

In terms of our farmer, Ramban's view is clear. The feelings of closeness to G-d need to be expressed to G-d in the most direct way possible. This happens at the Temple, where the presence of G-d is the most tangible. The service there is performed by kohanim, hence the re-quirement to bring the first fruits to a kohen. How can we make sense of Rashi's position?

Rabbi Eliyahu Mizrachi defends Rashi's view. He argues that the reason for bringing the first fruits to a kohen is not

only as part of the Temple service. The goal is to glorify the kohen and seek his blessing. Therefore, a person who views the kohanim of his generation as lack-ing in righteousness, may not want to praise them with his offering of the first fruits. The Torah compels him to do so anyway.

Rabbi Mizrachi's explanation adds depth to our larger discussion. Personal religious experiences are powerful and can drive a unique commitment to G-d, morality, and the truth. Unfortunately, the established religious institutions around us, and their representatives, may not always reflect our ideals. Sub-mitting to them may therefore seem like a betrayal of our own feelings. How can someone compromise on what he feels is the true path of G-d?

Despite the strength of this claim, the Torah compels the farmer to bring the symbol of his personal relationship with G-d and literally lay it at the feet of the kohanim, the religious establishment of his day. This is not because his feelings are invalid. It is because the kohanim of his generation are Divinely ordained. They are the religious leaders that the greater Jewish people need at that moment, in order to shepherd them along their historical path. An individual Jew may speak out and try to improve things based on his own understanding of G-d's will. But ultimately he must submit to the "kohen of his days", for the sake of the Jewish people as a whole.