

PARSHAS KI SAVO

by Rabbi Dr. Meir Tamari

"An Aramean tried to destroy my forefather and he went down to Egypt." The Divine wisdom enjoined Israel to bring annually a very small offering of the first fruits to the Temple and to make a public and formalized confession over that offering, something that we do not have with any other offering of the individuals. Furthermore, the bringing of Bikkurim is surrounded by many halakhot as to what may be brought and from where, when they are to be offered, and the form in which they are offered; all of them seemingly in excess of the actual size, value and nature of the things offered. The purpose of all of this is to teach us that the essence of the acceptance of His Kingship that is the basis for our spiritual perfection, is the belief that the world belongs to Him, that He alone is our Lord and Master, and that He watches over the world and is the source of all material blessings and wealth. No person should think that the earth belongs to them and that their wealth, power or success comes to them through their own ability, talent or endeavors; that is blasphemous and a revolt against the yoke of Heaven. To prevent that thought pattern, Hashem commanded us to bring every year, of our first fruits and to recite viduy acknowledging Him as the true and sole source of our success and well-being. The mitzvah of Bikkurim only applies after the blessing of Hashem are mentioned; when Israel comes into the Promised Land, conquers and allocates it and receives its harvests. Its mention after the recalling of what Amalek did to us is fitting as evidence of Hashem's goodness.

Always the farmer has to give the landowner his share of the crops or pay rent, before he can benefit from the yields; Yosef made the Egyptians give Pharaoh a fifth of all their produce after buying their fields from them during the famine. So too, we are required to acknowledge the true source of our wealth and make payment, even if it is only the one sixtieth that Chazal defined as the Bikkurim [the Torah did not specify the amount]. Since this message of Bikkurim is so basic to our spiritual perspectives, the halakhot involved were aimed at ensuring that it becomes part of the Jewish People's thought process. The farmer had to signify the first fruit while it was still forming on the trees or in the fields, only one of the 7 species were eligible and only from Eretz Yisrael to highlight G-d's gracious gift of the Holy Land the source of the farmer's wealth, although the fruit could be carried by a servant or an agent till Yerushalayim from there the farmer had to humble himself and to carry it in a basket to the Mikdash and place it before the Kohen, and the bringing, the placing and the viduy had to be public. Although not mandated by halakhah, we know from Massechet Bikkurim that the whole ceremony was the subject of much public festivity. [The necessity of our acknowledging Hashem as the true and only source of our wealth and success is

also the reason behind many other mitzvot such as the Omer, Shte Halechem, Shmittah and Yovel, Orlah etc].

The beginning of the Bikkurim Viduy is "an Aramean tried to destroy my forefather and he went down to Egypt". It is difficult to understand the connection that the verse makes between Lavan HaArami and Yaakov and his sons going down to galut in Egypt. After all, we know that the cause was the selling of Yosef by the brothers. Now from where did these tzaddikim inherit the jealousy and the hatred that could lead them to such an act. It was not from Avraham and Sarah, nor from Yitschak who were perfect and whole. However, we read, "And Yitschak took Rebecca to wife; a daughter of Betuel the Aramean from Padan Aram, a sister of Lavan the Aramean" (Ber. 25:20). So Lavan HaArami caused Yaakov and his sons to go down to galut in Egypt.

The viduy comes to announce that the land on which Israel dwells was not an inheritance from their fathers nor did they earn it through conquest, but rather it was a gift through Hashem's chesed. Yaakov Avinu was a stranger in Aram, penniless, without assets or property. Lavan HaArami, his uncle, was neither his benefactor nor the source of his wealth, rather sought to pursue and destroy him. When Yaakov Avinu went down to Galut in Egypt in his old age, although his descendants multiplied and became numerous there, nevertheless, they were oppressed and enslaved there. Even the hishtadlut of Yaakov could not save them so that it was only G-d's mercy and kindness that redeemed them from Egypt, brought them safely through the desert and brought them to the Promised Land and to the prosperity and success that they enjoyed there. Therefore it was in acknowledgement of His being the source of their redemption, their property and their wealth, that the farmers brought Bikkurim and recited this viduy. The simcha that our text talks about after the farmer had recited the viduy and left the Bet Hamikdash, flowed from the knowledge of the promise that Hashem provides for all our needs and those of our families but also so that we do righteousness with the widow, the orphan and the stranger. [The Orech Hashulchan explains that the reference to commerce b'emunah (Shulchan Aruch, Orech Chayim, section 146) refers to having the faith that Hashem provides].

The Torah singled out the 12 personal mitzvot (Devarim, 27:15-26) so that every person should be aware of the danger of transgressing them. They correspond to the 12 Tribes of Israel and refer to the potential for a particular sin in the special position or history of that tribe:

"Cursed be the man who will make a graven image" refers to Zimri and the tribe of Shimon for their part in the sin of Baal Peor. They were the most involved as witnessed by the higher rate of those killed as a result;

"One who degrades his father and mother" refers to Shimon and Levi who endangered their father by their action with Shechem;

"One who moves the boundary of his fellow", this refers to Gad, who in their concern for their wealth preferred to settle in Trans-Jordan and thus made them susceptible to stealing the inheritance of

other tribes;

"One who causes a blind person to go astray"; this refers to Issachar, since they were the scholars and any errors would lead astray the people who were blind in Torah knowledge in comparison to them;

"One who perverts a judgment of a ger, orphan or widow"; refers to Yehudah, since from him were descended the kings and the rulers whose duty it was to execute justice;

"One who lies with the wife of his father"; refers to Reuven, and the incident of Bilah;

"One who lies with an animal"; refers to Dan as Shimson sought out Delilah, who betrayed him. One who relates to an immoral woman is considered as one who lies with an animal;

"One who lies with his sister"; refers to Naphtali, whom Yaacov Avinu likened to a deer who is free from any restraints;

"One who lies with his mother-in-law", refers to Binyamin because of Pilegesh B'Givah. The term chatanto has various connotations and in this case refers to ones daughter-in-law since they all had relations with the same concubine;

"One who strikes his fellow in secret", refers to Zevulun because of Hoshea ben Eilah who assassinated Pekach and ruled in his stead thus causing the Assyrians to come and conquer Shomron and exile the 10 Tribes;

"One who takes a bribe to kill an innocent person", refers to Asher because of Pekach who took a bribe from the king of Aram to go to war with Yerushalyim;

"One who will not uphold the words of this Torah" refers to Yeravam ben Nevat who was of the tribe of Yosef, sinned and led Israel to sin. He made the Calves to prevent Israel from going to worship in Yerushalayim, created false priests and chagim, and offered unlawful sacrifices and incense. In this way he sought to uproot the whole Torah.

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