

# FIRST FRUITS

*by Shlomo Katz*

**Hamaayan / The Torah Spring  
Edited by Shlomo Katz**

**Ki Savo  
Volume XVII, No. 48  
16 Elul 5763  
September 13, 2003**

**Sponsored by Irving and Arline Katz  
on the yahrzeit of father  
Moshe Aharon ben Menashe Reiss a"h  
The Sabrin family  
in memory of mother  
Bayla bas Zev a"h (Bella Sabrin)**

---

Today's Learning:

Kelim 27:4-5

O.C. 86:1-87:2

Daf Yomi (Bavli): Zevachim 96

Daf Yomi (Yerushalmi): Megillah 16

Our parashah opens with the mitzvah to bring bikkurim / first fruits to the Temple. The Torah says (26:2), "You shall take of the first of every fruit of the ground that you bring in from your Land that Hashem, your G-d, gives you, and you shall put it in a basket." R' Eliezer Hager z"l (rabbi of Vizhnitz,

Romania and rosh yeshiva of the Vizhnitzer Yeshiva in Tel Aviv; died 1946) comments on this verse:

Many sources teach that one must work to reach the level where he attributes everything to G-d and does not, G-d forbid, take credit for himself. This is alluded to in our pasuk: You shall take of the first of every fruit of the ground that you bring in from your Land and realize that it is Hashem, your G-d, who gives it to you. Although you have worked hard, it is of course Hashem who causes the earth to give fruit.

"You shall put it in a basket." Our Sages learned from this phrase that bikkurim must be brought to the Temple in a container, not simply in the farmer's hands. So, too, the feeling that one's success comes entirely from G-d must be safeguarded as if in a container. (Aside from the plain implication of the verse that the bikkurim must be in a container, R' Hager notes that the gematria of the word "tenne" / "basket" (60) equals the gematria of the word "kli" / "container.")

The Mishnah states that when the farmer goes out to his field and sees the first fruits beginning to appear, he should wrap a "gemi" / "band" around the branch that is bearing fruit so that he can recognize it at the time of the harvest as the first fruit. The word "gemi," R' Hager notes, represents the initial letters of the verse (Tehilim 111:2), "Gedolim ma'asei Hashem" / "Great are G-d's works." This is the message that the mitzvah of bikkurim is intended to teach. (Damesek Eliezer)

\*\*\*\*\*

*"Then you shall say before Hashem, your G-d, 'I have removed the holy things from the house, and I have also given it to the Levite, to the proselyte, to the orphan, and to the widow, according to whatever commandment You commanded me; 'lo avarti' / I have not transgressed any of your commandments, 'lo shachachti' / and I have not forgotten'." (26:13)*

R' Moshe Shick z"l (1805-1879; rabbi of Huszt, Hungary) writes: Prior to the sin of the Golden Calf, the priestly function was performed by the firstborn, not by the family of Aharon. If not for that sin, the bikkurim / first fruits and the terumot and ma'asrot / tithes would not be given to the Kohanim and Levi'im. Rather, they would have remained "at home" with each family's first born.

Therefore, a Jew declares when he finishes giving all of the gifts from his produce: "I, through my participation in the Golden Calf, have removed the holy things from the house, etc." How so? "Lo avarti" / "I transgressed the prohibition that begins with the word 'Lo', namely Shmot 20:3: 'Lo yihyeh' / 'You shall not recognize the gods of others in My presence'." Moreover, "Lo shachachti" / "I forgot another prohibition that begins with the word 'Lo', i.e., Shmot 20:4: 'Lo ta'aseh' / 'You shall not make for yourself a carved image nor any likeness'."

(Maharam Shick Al Ha'Torah)

\*\*\*\*\*

*"All these curses will come upon you and pursue you and overtake you until you are destroyed . . ."*

(28:45)

Our Sages note several differences between the Tochachah / rebuke in this parashah and the Tochachah in Sefer Vayikra (26:27- 44). For example, all of the warnings and curses in our parashah are worded in the singular, while those in Vayikra are worded in the plural. There also are differences in how this Tochachah and the one in Vayikra may be read in public. The Gemara (Megillah 31b) states that the entire Tochachah in Vayikra must be read without interruption, while the Tochachah in our parashah may be divided into two or more aliyot.

Ramban (Spain and Eretz Yisrael; 1194-1270) teaches that the Tochachah in Vayikra relates to the short exile which followed the destruction of the first Bet Hamikdash, while the Tochachah in our parashah describes the longer exile that has followed the destruction of the Second Temple. In light of Ramban's observation, R' Moshe Avigdor Amiel z"l (Chief Rabbi of Antwerp and Tel Aviv; died 1935) offers an explanation for the differences between the two Tochachot and for the harsh language of this Tochachah (for example, the verse quoted above). He writes:

There are two circumstances in which a bet din / Jewish court may impose the penalty of makkot / lashes: (1) if a person transgresses certain negative commandments, for example, the prohibition on making an idol, and (2) if a person refuses to perform an affirmative commandment, for example, if a person refuses to wear tefilin or lift a lulav. What is the difference between these two cases of lashes? One who transgresses a negative commandment always gets 39 lashes (assuming he is physically fit to withstand them), while a person who refuses to perform a mitzvah is whipped until he gives up his obstinance. Depending on the person, he may receive one lash or hundreds. Chazal go so far as to say that a person who refuses to wear tefilin, take a lulav or perform another affirmative commandment should be whipped until his soul leaves him (or until he agrees to changes his ways).

There is another difference between these two types of lashes. When the 39 lashes are administered to a transgressor, each lash brings him closer to atonement. Not so the one who is whipped for refusing to perform a mitzvah. The more lashes he gets, the more angry G-d becomes with him, for only a truly wicked person would remain obstinate in the face of such punishment.

The first Bet Hamikdash was destroyed because the Jewish people transgressed three negative commandments -- idolatry, adultery and murder. This is why the first Tochachah is in the plural; the punishment for transgressing a negative commandment -- 39 lashes -- is the same for every person. And, the punishment is finite. Moreover, just as each lash brings the transgressor closer to atonement, so each curse brought the generation of the first exile closer to forgiveness until, after 70 short years, they returned to the Land.

In contrast, the second Bet Hamikdash was destroyed because of unwarranted hatred. In essence, the Jewish people refused to perform the affirmative commandment of "You shall love your fellow as yourself." For such a refusal, the lashing is not finite; it continues until the obstinate person repents

or until he expires. This is why the Tochachah says: "All these curses will come upon you and pursue you and overtake you until you are destroyed." This also explains why the curses in our parashah are worded in the singular and why it is permitted to interrupt the reading. The curses are worded in the singular because every person's breaking point is different; thus, the Tochachah must be tailored to each individual. And, we are permitted to interrupt the reading of the Tochachah because we need time to reflect on our lashings. Have we absorbed enough punishment or do we need more?

This idea explains what we have witnessed over the last 2000 years, i.e., alternating periods of lashings and reprieve. We would err to assume that a period of relative quiet signals the end of the exile, explains R' Amiel. Rather, even the one who is whipped because he refuses to perform a mitzvah must be given short reprieves to reflect on his alternatives. This is what we, too, must reflect on as the Tochachah is read.

(Derashot El Ami)

\*\*\*\*\*

## **Shabbat**

R' Moshe Terechensky z"l hy"d (1858-1942; rabbi of Kremenchuk, Ukraine) related the following story: One Friday night, the Chortkover Rebbe, R' David Moshe Friedman z"l (1838-1903) was about to recite kiddush at his tisch when a stranger entered the bet midrash carrying a walking stick. It seems that this man was out for a stroll and had stopped in to see what the large crowd of chassidim was doing in the bet midrash at that hour. However, as there was no eruv in that area, carrying a walking stick was forbidden by halachah. When the Rebbe saw the man, his face turned white, and he put down his kiddush cup and left the room.

All of the chassidim were bewildered by the Rebbe's reaction, as was the visitor himself. All waited to see what would transpire. After some time, the Rebbe returned and recited kiddush with his usual zeal. A few minutes later, the stranger left to continue his stroll.

Then the Rebbe explained: "The Ba'al Shem Tov taught that one does not witness another person sinning unless the witness himself shares some aspect of the same failing and needs to be alerted to repent. Thus, when I saw that visitor transgressing the laws of Shabbat, I retired to my room to carefully examine my own deeds to determine in what way my own Shabbat observance was lacking. After all, why else was I shown a Jew violating the Shabbat if not to awaken me to improve my own observance?!

"Then I said to myself: 'Perhaps there is another reason that I was shown that transgression. The Shulchan Aruch (O.C. 271:10) instructs that the first paragraph of kiddush, "Va'yechulu," be recited while standing, because one who recites it gives testimony that G-d created the world. And, the Gemara (Kiddushin 65b) teaches: "Witnesses were created only because there are liars." It follows that our recitation of Va'yechulu has meaning precisely because there are people such as that man,

who do not acknowledge the holiness of Shabbat.' Once I understood this, I returned to recite kiddush."

*(Quoted in Haggadah Shel Pesach Adir Bimluchah p. 49)*

---

Copyright © 2002 by [Shlomo Katz](#) and Project Genesis, Inc.

---

The editors hope these brief 'snippets' will engender further study and discussion of Torah topics ("lehagdil Torah u'leha'adirah"), and your letters are appreciated. Web archives at [Project Genesis](#) start with 5758 (1997) and may be retrieved from the [Hamaayan](#) page. Text archives from 1990 through the present may be retrieved from <http://www.acoast.com/~sehc/hamaayan/>. Donations to HaMaayan are tax-deductible.

---