

# THE CONNECTION BETWEEN AMALEK AND THE FIRST FRUITS

by Rabbi Yissocher Frand

## Parshas Ki Savo

### The Connection Between Amalek and the First Fruits

*These divrei Torah were adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Tapes on the weekly portion: CD #912 Shaimos - What Do I Do With All Those Papers? Good Shabbos!*

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Parshas Ki Savo begins with the mitzvah of bringing the First Fruits of a person's crop to the Kohen in Yerushalayim: "And you shall take from the first of all fruits of the ground that you bring from your land that the L-rd your G-d gives you; and you will place it in a basket and you will walk to the place that the L-rd your G-d will choose to cause his Presence to dwell there." [Devorim 26:2]

Normally, we try to find a connection between the sequentially juxtaposed portions of the Torah. The question is -- can we find a connection between the mitzvah of bringing the First Fruits at the beginning of Parshas Ki Savo and the section we read at the end of Parshas Ki Seitzei regarding remembering that which Amalek did to us.

At first glance, they seem to be very disparate matters, with no relationship whatsoever.

There is another question I would like to analyze. The mitzvah of bringing Bikkurim does not just consist of bringing the first fruits to the Kohen. There is also a specific text that must be read (mikra Bikkurim): The farmer recites a piece of Jewish history. He relates that our Patriarch Yaakov worked for his uncle Lavan, who tried to kill him. The narrative includes mention of the descent to Egypt and the suffering they endured there. The narrative includes praise for the Almighty for taking us out from Egypt with a mighty Hand and an outstretched Arm.

This recounting of Jewish history is itself problematic in that it seems to begin in the middle of the story -- with Yaakov's encounters with Lavan. If the purpose is to recite Jewish history, why not tell the whole story beginning with Avraham, moving on to Yitzchak, and then going into the life of the Patriarch Yaakov? Specifically, what is the significance of highlighting the story of Yaakov's encounter with Lavan when performing the mitzvah of bringing Bikkurim?

We have said many times that Mikra Bikkurim is an example of one of the most fundamental obligations the Torah places on Jews: the obligation of recognizing the need to express gratitude (hakaras hatov).

The Alshich in this week's parsha elaborates on the Medrash which interprets the opening words of the Torah (Bereishis Barah Elokim) as meaning homiletically "the world was created for those things which are called 'First' (reishis)". The Medrash goes on to show that Israel, Torah, and Bikkurim are all called Reishis [first] therefore, it may be said that the entire world was created for the sake of Israel, the sake of Torah, and the sake of Bikkurim.

The Alshich questions the emphasis on the mitzvah of bringing the First Fruits (mah kol hacharada hazos?). The Alshich answers that what is implied here is the mitzvah of Hakaras HaTov. We must be grateful to the Almighty when He showers us with His bounty. Recognizing the need to express gratitude is fundamental to being a decent human being. So much so that it may be said -- according to this Medrash -- that the world was created to teach this lesson.

No one is more capable of expressing thanks for having received "tov" than a person who has previously experienced the opposite of "tov". No person is more grateful for his good health than a person who has been sick. We take our good health for granted. All one needs is a bout of a serious illness or a broken bone or a stay in the hospital and then one realizes the blessing of good health. A person who all his life was destitute and did not know where his next meal was coming from and all of a sudden his luck turned around and he became wealthy, this is a person who appreciates what it means to have money! Such a person remembers what it is to not have money.

The section of Mikra Bikkurim is the parsha of Hakaras HaTov (recognizing our debt of gratitude) for finally having a land that we can call our own. Finally, we have entered Eretz Yisrael after being strangers, nomads, slaves for upwards of 400 years. This is a time when we can appreciate the fact that every tribe and every Jew had his own plot and place to call their own in the Land of Israel.

Imagine someone who lived in an apartment his whole life, always moving from place to place. Finally, he gets his own home. Imagine the joy: "It is my house. I do not need to ask permission from the landlord to put up a picture. It is mine!" Multiply this on a national scale -- finally we have a place of our own!

We know what it is to be a stranger in someone else's land. This is the Hakaras HaTov of harvesting our first fruits in Eretz Yisrael. Now we understand why we start with Yaakov Avinu. It was Yaakov who had to leave Eretz Yisrael. He realized what it was to be a stranger in someone else's land. After living for many years in his parents' house in the Land of Israel, he then needs to go into exile and put up with uncle Lavan and all his tricks in Lavan's house in a strange land. He becomes a stranger and learns what it means to live where he does not have a place to call his own.

The same Yaakov Avinu later must descend to Egypt. Yaakov Avinu is that patriarch who personally feels the pain of homelessness. Avraham Avinu lived in Eretz Yisrael. Yitzchak Avinu never left Eretz

Yisrael. But Yaakov Avinu is the nomad. He is the wandering Jew. This is why the parsha of Mikra Bikurim begins with the words "Arami oved ovi", because Yaakov Avinu knew what it meant not to live in one's own land. This is not just Jewish history in general. It is Jewish History of the wandering Jew.

This is also, the commentaries tell us, the connection between Mikra Bikurim and "Remember that which Amalek did to you." If it would have been up to Amalek, we would have never arrived in the Land of Israel. The incident with Amalek highlights the trials and tribulations we had to endure to get to Eretz Yisrael. It was fraught with danger and fraught with war.

As Chazal explain, it was because Amalek started up with us that later Sichon and Og felt bold enough to attack us. Amalek's brazenness caused us to need to fight all the battles that were eventually necessary to enter and conquer Eretz Yisrael.

The Ramban writes in this week's parsha that we do not find a required minimum amount of "first fruits" that one must bring. Just as we have a rule by Teruma (on a Biblical level) that a single grain of wheat given as Teruma exempts an entire pile of grain, so too there is no required minimum measure of Bikurim that must be offered. A single grape suffices to qualify the farmer who brings it as "one who is not an ingrate".

We learn from here a basic idea in gift giving: The most important thing is what one writes in the card. Maybe a person cannot afford the most expensive gift, but if he writes a heartfelt note of good wishes and expresses gratitude to the recipient -- this by itself proves that he is not an ingrate (kafui tova). What is in the box is almost secondary. One can turn the smallest of gifts to an eloquent testimony that the giver is not a kafui tova. One's child can make a project for his parent's birthday that is a worthless little nothing, but he writes a card: "Mommy, I love you." That is enough to melt the parent's heart. This is what we learn from the parsha of Mikra bikurim.

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*This week's write-up is adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Torah Tapes on the weekly Torah portion. The halachic topics dealt with in the portion of Ki Savo in the Commuter Chavrusah Series are the following:*

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