

*When you enter the land that the Lord your God is giving you as a heritage, and you possess it and settle in it, you shall take some of every first fruit of the soil, which you harvest from the land that the Lord your God is giving you, put it in a basket and go to the place where the Lord your God will choose to establish His name. You shall go to the priest in charge at that time and say to him, "I acknowledge this day before the Lord your God that I have entered the land that the Lord swore to our fathers to assign us."...You shall then recite as follows before the Lord your God: "My father was a fugitive Aramean. He went down to Egypt with meager numbers and sojourned there..." --- Deut. 26:1-3, 5*

How do they take up the first-fruits to Jerusalem? The men of all the towns that belonged to the **ma'amad** (the post of representatives assisting with the Temple service) gathered together in its town and spent the night in the open place of the town and came to the houses. Early in the morning, the officer said: *Arise and let us go up to Zion unto the Lord our God* (Jer. 31:6). Before them went the ox, its horns overlaid with gold and a wreath of olive-leaves on its head, and the flute was played before them, until they approached Jerusalem. When they approached Jerusalem, they sent messengers before them and adorned their first-fruits. The officers and the prefects and the treasurers of the Temple went forth to meet them; according to the honor due to those who came would they go out. And all the craftsmen in Jerusalem would rise up before them and greet them, saying: "Brothers, men of such-and-such a place, you are welcome!" The flute was played before them, until they reached the Temple Mount. When they reached the Temple Mount, even Agrippa the king would take his basket on his shoulder and enter. When they reached the Temple Court, the Levites sang the song: *I will exalt You, O Lord, for You have raised me up, and have not suffered my enemies to rejoice over me* (Ps. 30). While the basket was yet on his shoulder, a man would recite the passage (from Deut. 26)... --- **Mishnah, Bikkurim ch. 3**

A similar purpose underlies the law concerning the heave-offering (**terumah**, Deut. 18:4), the dough-offering (**challah**, Numb. 15:20), the first-fruit (**bikkurim**, Exod. 23:19) and the first shearing (**reshit ha-gez**, Deut. 18:4). For the first of everything is to be devoted to God, and by doing so man accustoms himself to being generous and to limit his appetite for eating and his desire for property...

The reciting of a portion of the Torah when the first-fruits are brought to the Temple promotes humility as well. For he who brings the first-fruits takes the basket upon his shoulders and proclaims the kindness and goodness of God. This ceremony teaches man that it is essential in the service of God to recall previous experiences of suffering and distress in days of comfort. The Torah lays stress on this duty in several places; *You shall remember that you have been a slave...* (Deut. 5:15). Those who amass wealth and live in comfort are more prone to fall victim to the vices of insolence and haughtiness, and abandon all good principles; *Lest you eat and be full...and your heart be lifted up and you forget God* (Deut. 8:12-14); *And Yeshurun grew fat and kicked* (Deut. 32:15). On account of this fear, the Torah commanded us to bring each year a certain portion before the Lord and His glory, when we offer the first-fruit. You know how much the Torah insists that we should always remember the plagues that befell the Egyptians; *That you may remember the day when you came forth out of the land of Egypt all the days of your life* (Deut. 16:3); *That you may tell in the ears of your child what things I have wrought in Egypt* (Exod. 10:2). Such an observance was necessary in order to perpetuate the memory of the departure from Egypt, since such events authenticate prophecy and the doctrine of reward and punishment. The benefit of any commandment that serves to keep certain miracles fresh in the memory or to perpetuate true faith, is therefore obvious. --- Maimonides, Guide for the Perplexed 3:39

The essence of acknowledging Divine sovereignty lies in man's gratitude to the Creator as the source of all the good, and his appreciation that man himself is in no way responsible for all that the might of his own hand has accomplished. Failure to realize this implies repudiation of the yoke and fear of heaven and all the evil consequences that flow therefrom. This is indeed the subject of the warnings contained in Moses' address to the people in Deuteronomy (4:25ff). they would forget God's bounty and imagine that they were the authors of all the benefits they were enjoying in the Promised Land. They were therefore bidden to perform a rite that would act as a constant reminder that *The earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof*, that everything was a gift bestowed by Him and He was responsible for all their prosperity, the bringing of the first-fruits. Indeed all such offerings constituted acknowledgment of Divine overlordship. --- Akedat Yitzchak, Isaac Arama, 15<sup>th</sup> c. Spain

The purpose of bringing the first-fruits was to humble man's selfish passions. Since the first-fruits constitute man's most treasured possession -- see Hosea 9:10, *as the first ripe in the fig tree at her first time*, and Isa. 28:4, *as an early fig before the fruit harvest; whoever sees it devours it...* -- God commanded man to subdue his natural instincts and not eat therefrom, but rather dedicate them to God the Most High. --- Abarbanel, 15<sup>th</sup> c. Spain, Italy

*The Lord freed us from Egypt by a mighty hand, by an outstretched arm and awesome power, and by signs and portents. He brought us to this place and gave us this land, a land flowing with milk and honey. Wherefore I now bring the first fruits of the soil which You, O Lord, have given me.* --- Deut. 26:8-10

In exchange for that "bringing" (v. 9), he gratefully "brings" (v. 10) his first-fruits... Since man cannot really reciprocate God's bounty, for the simple reason that *The earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof*, or, as stated in I Chron. 29:14, *For all things come of You, and of Your own have we given You*, it is left to man to perform a symbolic act leaving all before the Lord, and make the declaration formulated in our **sedra**...

Note carefully the phrasing of the declaration and the exact nature of its content. The Israelite farmer who brings the first-fruits of his soil does not say, "My fathers CAME to the land which the Lord swore to give to them." Rather, he proclaims in every generation, as long as his people dwells in the land, whenever he brings its first-fruits, in thanks to the Almighty, *I have entered the land*... He himself... just as our Passover Haggadah states: "In every generation every Jew is obliged to see himself as if he had gone out of Egypt... the Holy Blessed One did not only redeem our fathers, but redeemed us too with them. --- Nechama Leibowitz, 20<sup>th</sup> c. Israel

In Deut. 26:10, the Israelites are directed to make an offering of the first fruits of the harvest as an expression of thanksgiving. Then, they are encouraged to celebrate the blessings that they have been given, along with the blessings of Levites and the strangers in their midst. Only when they have shared these blessings with others, including the stranger, can they be satisfied, as the text suggests in 26:11 (*And you shall enjoy, together with the Levite and the stranger in your midst, all the bounty...*). There can be no satiation until they have done so and

then they can appear before God, having accomplished what they were bidden to do. --- Rabbi Kerry Olitzky, contemporary

The rich brought their fruits in baskets made of gold; the poor in baskets made of cane. --- **Mishnah, Bikkurim 3:8**

The **Kohen** was to take not only the contents, the fruits of the vine or barley or figs, but the container, the basket also, for it says: *The **Kohen** shall take the basket from your hand* (Deut. 26:4). Why? In the event that the fruits became unclean somehow, and so uneatable, the basket at least remained for the **Kohen**. --- Jerusalem Talmud, **Bikkurim 1:7**

Our Sages teach that any verse that begins with the word “**V’hayah**” is an expression of joy. Thus, our verse is teaching that one who makes **aliyah** to **Eretz Yisrael** should do so with joy. It is wrong for a person to say, “I have to leave my home for health or financial reasons, so I may as well move to **Eretz Yisrael**,” R’ Palagi writes. Rather, **aliyah** should be motivated solely by the joy of living in such a holy place as **Eretz Yisrael**.

If, for whatever reason, a person is unable to move to **Eretz Yisrael**, he still must yearn for the Land, as we read (Ps. 87:5), “But of Zion it can be said, ‘Man and man who was born there.’” Why the redundancy (“man and man”)? The Talmud (**Ketubot 75a**) explains: “One who was born there and one who yearns to see it are equal [as if the latter was born there].” And, the Gematria (numerical value) of the words **Eretz Yisrael** (832) equals that of “**Tet Lev**” (**Tav-Tav Lamed-Bet**), “pay attention.” Then, God will view one’s desire to perform this mitzvah as if the person had actually performed the mitzvah. --- Rabbi Chayim Palagi, 19<sup>th</sup> c. Turkey, **Tokhachat Chayim on Chayei Sarah**