

## Ki Savo - Rabbi Lerner - September 2, 2012

### The Mitzvah of Bikurim

26:1: *It will be (Vehaya) when you enter the land that Hashem, your God, has given to you as an inheritance (Nachala), and you possess it (ViRishta), and dwell in it (Veyashavta).* The word Yerusha means actual acquisition of the land by conquest. Veyashavta means to settle it. This pasuk tells them that there will be a Chaluka, the division of the land after the conquest. It took 7 years to conquer it, and another 7 to divide it.

26:2: *And you should take from the first of every fruit of the ground that you bring in from your land that Hashem, your God, has given you, and you shall place it in a basket and go to the place that Hashem, your God, will choose to make His Name rest there (Leshakeyn Shemo Sham).* On a yearly basis the farmer presents the first fruits to the Kohen and makes the famous statement of Arami Oved Avi. **Rashi:** this teaches us that they were not obligated in the mitzvah of Bikurim until they conquered and settled the land - the first opportunity would be in the fifteenth year after they entered the land (even longer for fruit of new trees that they planted). But what about fruits that grew beforehand, on its own or what the Canaani had planted? Did they bring any of those fruits as Bikurim earlier?

**Sifri:** Vehaya means immediately - immediately after they entered the land. Furthermore, it means they should do the mitzvah of Bikurim because the reward for doing this mitzvah is that they will conquer the land. But this is the reverse of what they had to do - first they had to conquer the land, and then bring the Bikurim? How could they earn the land with this mitzvah if they have not yet conquered the land? **Malbim:** what the Sifri is really saying is that Hashem is giving them the land *because* of the mitzvah of Bikurim that they *will* do - that is why they will be successful in conquering the land; there is something special about doing this mitzvah that will entitle them to successfully conquer the land.

*Vehaya Ki Savo El Haaretz.* The word Vehaya is the word of being - their very being in the land is because of the mitzvah of Bikurim. There are only two places in the Torah where it says Vehaya Ki Savo as opposed to just saying Ki Savo. **Midrash:** Vehaya means the language of simchah, of joy and happiness. There is something about this mitzvah that is tied to happiness.

**Malbim:** they do not conquer the land immediately. It says Vehaya because it is different from other mitzvos like Orla, where you cannot eat of the fruits of a new tree for three years - this only applies to the new trees they plant. But Bikurim is different. They had to bring Bikurim from a vineyard or tree that was pre-existing - after the 14 years they immediately bring Bikurim; with the other mitzvos, the earliest date was 17 years after their entry into the land. Until the land was divided, they couldn't bring Bikurim because the fruit and land were not yet owned by any one person. The Sifri means immediately after the land is owned by someone, even though that person did not work the land.

**Rav Nissin Alpert:** what does it mean that they will inherit the land because of this mitzvah - they can't do the mitzvah until after they had already conquered the land? How can they say that because of the merit of this mitzvah they will enter the land? It is not like Tefillin which can be done anywhere - Bikurim is only obligated in the land of Israel and could not be performed until after all of the battles and division of the land? What does the Sifri really mean? The Torah is teaching us that it is possible that a person can enter the land, can be fighting battles and take possession of the land, but on some level is still not yet considered to be in the land. You are not fully in the land until after you harvest the first fruit of the land (does not have to be

what you planted), and bring it to the Bais Hamikdash. It is brought as part of a magnificent parade. You are not considered to really be in the land until you bring Bikurim to the chosen place - you are bringing the first fruits to God - that is the real reason for being in the land. The focal point is Yerushalayim and the Mikdash. You are not fully in the land on a metaphysical sense until you have brought Bikurim to the Temple. When you appear before the Kohen with your fruit, then you can say the special formula, that Hashem brought you to this land and gave it to you fulfilling the promise to the forefathers. It is not just geographically being in the land - it is about reaching the highest level of what being in the land is all about - it is about serving God with happiness. It is through the zechus of the mitzvah of Bikurim - of bringing the fruit of this land to the Temple to connect with God - that we earn the land; that is the real settlement of the land of Israel. It does not the physical entry into the land - it is connecting to Hashem via the Bais Hamikdash.

26:2: ...go to the place that Hashem, your God, will choose to make His Name rest there (*Leshakeyn Shemo Sham*). Since the Bais Hamikdash was not built for hundreds of years by Shlomo, what is this chosen place to which they bring Bikurim? What does it mean to the place where Hashem's name will rest? It is more than 14 years - it is really hundreds of years before there will be a Beis Hamikdash? **Malbim**: the chosen place, as the Sifri says, is Shiloh and the Bais Olamim (Bais Hamikdash). When Shiloh was destroyed, there was no Bikurim until the Bais Hamikdash was built. Why only Shiloh and not Nov or Gilgal where the Aron also rested? Because Yehoshuah set it up in Shiloh where the whole congregation could come and where the Shechina resided. But why not Nov or Gilgal? In addition to this pasuk, there are three other places in Tanach where it says you should bring Raishis Bikurei to **Bais Hashem**, the house of God. Shiloh was called the House of God. A Mishkan is a place where the shechina resides, like in the desert - it is not a house, it lacks permanence. In Shmuel it says that the Aron was brought to Shiloh, the House of God. It had to be something built of stone. Shiloh, however, is sometimes called a Mishkan, unlike the Bais Hamikdash, because part of the structure was made from the Mishkan assembled by Moshe and used for 40 years in the desert. The Mishkan was all that was used in Nov and Gilgal - so there was never any permanence in those locations. In Shiloh, there were stone walls, but the roof was made of the same skins from the original Mishkan made by Moshe - that is why Shiloh is sometimes called Mishkan as well as a Bayis. Certainly the Bais Hamikdash, which was completely permanent with stone walls and a solid roof, was only called a Bayis. These were the only two places that were permanent to which Bikurim were brought. You needed the permanent relationship between God and us to bring Bikurim with simchah.

The Bikurim were brought up with great happiness in a parade, accompanied by many people, with a huge reception in Yerushalayim to greet them. In 26:11 we see the final words about this mitzvah - *You shall rejoice with all of the enormous good that Hashem, your God, did to you, your household, the leviyim and gerim who are in your midst*. The ultimate simchah is only in front of God and His house. The simchah that is described for the Yom Tov of Succos we experience with the lulav and esrog in Yerushalayim at the Bais Hamikdash - that was the only place you could take the lulav for all seven days - outside of Yerushalayim the lulav was taken only on the first day of Succos, until after the destruction of the second Temple when there was a Rabbinic proclamation for 7 days to commemorate what used to go on in the Temple. But in those times, it was 7 days only in the place of simchah, at the Temple. There can only be real simchah when we are at God's house - that is when we bring Bikurim. The real coming to Eretz Yisrael is connecting with God in His permanent home - that is what gives us incredible happiness. This is all represented by the mitzvah of Bikurim.

The Tochachah follows the mitzvah of Bikurim, with 98 frightening curses, twice what was in Bechukosai, if we stray from God. In the middle of the curses, 28:46-7, it says the curses afflicting the Jews *will be a sign and a wonder to the nations of the world forever, and they will strike the Jews because you did not serve God with simchah and goodness of heart when everything was abundant.* **Rabbeinu Bachya**: Hashem is holding the Jewish people guilty for serving Him without simchah. We did the mitzvos, but failed to do them with great joy. The simchah that accompanies the mitzvos is a separate mitzvah in its own right - the proper attitude is critical, and it comes with a separate reward. Even when they did the mitzvos, if done without simchah, they were punished. We must serve God and do the mitzvos, but with a tremendous sense of joy. Why?

**Eylah Hadevarim (Rav Schlessinger)**: that is why it says Vehaya at the beginning of the parsha - if you want to enter and stay in the land, it must be done with simchah. Why is that so critical? He quotes **Rabbeinu Yonah**: the essence of the mitzvos and tefillos we do is a personal desire to do what God wants - Hashem wants us to have an inner longing to do His mitzvos - He does not want Jews to be robots - he wants us to be burning with a fire to do these mitzvos. Jews are considered to have abandoned God when they do not have a fear of heaven - if they do the mitzvos in a mechanical, dry way; if they have no feeling or love of God. When there is a desire to go out and experience the world, if you don't have a pre-existing tight connection to God, you will be pulled away from Yiddishkeit. The lack of simchah will not cause punishment - but it's absence will start a downward slide - if you don't feel great happiness and joy in your heart, the religion will disappear as it gets more and more diluted with each generation. That is the connection of Bikurim, the ultimate expression of happiness with God; while the curses at the end of the parsha will be the end point if we do not serve Him with simchah.