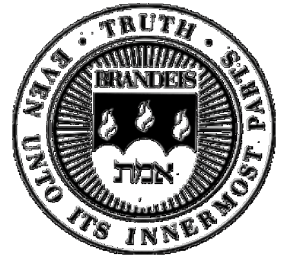




תורת אמת



A Weekly Brandeis Orthodox Organization Publication

16 Elul 5769 / 5 September 2009 Vol. XI Issue 2

PARSHAT KI TAVO

Candle-lighting: 6:57 pm
Shacharit: 9 am
Sof Kriat Shema: **9:28** am
Sof Zman Tefilla: 10:33 am
Mincha 6:40 pm
Shkia: 7:11 pm
Motzei Shabbat: 7:56 pm

Matter of the Heart

By Rabbi Kaplowitz

Bikkurim, Israel, and You

By Aviva Zadoff '10

Parsha in a Box

- *Bikkurim*, the first fruits
- *Viduy ma'aser*, confession of the tithes
- The covenant between Hashem and Bnei Yisrael
- Blessings if we do the *mitzvot* and listen to Hashem
- Curses if we do not do the *mitzvot* and listen to Hashem

Most of the *parsha* full of the details of the blessings and the curses. If you want to know more, just follow along during Torah reading.

Shabbat Shalom!

Parshat Ki Tavo ends on an interesting note. After the horrific and terrifying account of the *tochecha* and what will happen if the Jewish people do not follow Hashem's commandments, Moshe turns to the entire Jewish people and say to them the following: "You have seen all that the Lord did before your very eyes in the land of Egypt, to Pharaoh and to all his courtiers and to his whole country: the wondrous feats that you saw with your own eyes, those prodigious signs and marvels. **Yet to this day the Lord has not given you a heart to understand or eyes to see or ears to hear...**" (*Devarim* 29:1-3). He proceeds to tell them of the miracles that G-d performed for them on a daily basis during their travels in the desert, and of their initial conquests over Og and Sichon. Rashi is troubled why Moshe emphasizes the phrase "*ad hayom hazeh* – to this day," which usually indicates a specific day with significance. Rashi explains that the day in question is the day on which Moshe transmitted the Torah to the *Kohanim* and tribe of Levi (see *Devarim* 31:9). Rashi explains that as *B'nei Yisrael* saw Moshe giving the Torah over to his own tribe, they got upset and said, "We were also at Mt. Sinai, and received the Torah. Why are you giving it to your tribe – tomorrow they might say 'it was given to us and not to you.'" Rashi concludes that Moshe was very happy when they came to him with this complaint. He declared, "Today you have become a nation. Today I see and understand that you do desire to be close to G-d." Thus, according to Rashi it was only on this day that Moshe could say with confidence that *B'nei Yisrael* truly understand and accept what it means to be G-d's chosen people.

While Rashi offers a beautiful

(Rabbi Kaplowitz continued on page 3)

The *Parsha* this week opens up with the mitzvah of *bikkurim* which is the obligation of a land owner to take his first fruits and give them as an offering in the *Beit Hamikdash*. The Torah tells us of the procedure for giving *bikkurim* and the ceremony involved. *bikkurim* is one of several *mitzvot* that are directly dependent on the land of Israel, and these *mitzvot* are always difficult for me to fully understand and relate to having never been a farmer. It is hard to really internalize the difficulty of these *mitzvot* when one is so unfamiliar with that type of life. Through understanding the *mitzva* of *bikkurim* though I hope to come to a better realization of what it is all of us can learn from this *mitzva*.

The *mitzva* of *bikkurim* has similarities and differences to other land based *mitzvot* such as *trumah*, *ma'aser*, *shimtah* etc. The biggest and most glaring similarity is that they are all based on working and benefiting from the produce of the land of Israel. But there are several aspects to the *mitzvah* of *bikkurim* which distinguishes it from the other *mitzvot* in this category.

Most noticeable is that *bikkurim* has a formal ceremonial declaration that the other *mitzvot* don't really have (with the exception of the short passage said at the conclusion of *ma'aser* which is also found in our *parsha*). This *bikkurim* declaration must have significance to the *mitzvah* and it will be discussed shortly.

Bikkurim is also the only one of these *mitzvot* that must be given as a *mincha* offering in the *Beit Hamikdash*. In fact *bikkurim* is only done when the *Beit Hamikdash* is standing unlike the other land *mitzvot* which are always done.

The *mitzva* of *bikkurim* only applies

(Aviva Zadoff continued on page 3)

Thank G-d

By Elisha Fredman '10

(These ideas are adapted from a *shiur* I heard from R' Menachem Leibtag)

In *parshat Ki Tavo*, we find two examples of obligatory declarations, precisely where the main speech of *Sefer Devarim*, the “*chukim* and *mishpatim*” section, reaches its conclusion. Within this section, Moshe has reviewed a broad spectrum of laws relating to the process of taking possession of *Eretz Yisrael*, as well as to life once settled: The commandment to establish the National Center at *ha-makom asher yivchar* Hashem, the place where G-d will choose, *mitzvot* relating to national leadership and waging war, and a variety of civil laws (“*mitzvot bein adam le-chavero*”).

Now, in *parshat Ki Tavo*, Moshe delivers two concluding *mitzvot*: the declaration that one must give when coming to *Yerushalayim* to present *bikkurim*, and *Viduy Ma'aser*, a declaration recited every three years when the second tithe is given to the poor. Immediately following these two *parshiot*, Moshe describes the ceremony which will take place when Bnei Yisrael cross the *Yarden* into *Eretz Yisrael*. Therefore, these two *mitzvot* are the closing bookends to the entire section of *mitzvot* given by Moshe in *Sefer Devarim*.

If we consider the context of these *mitzvot*, however, it seems that they are not in their natural location, but rather belong earlier in the *sefer*. Thematically, *mikra bikkurim* would fit better in *parshat Re'eh*, where numerous *mitzvot* relating to “*ha-makom asher yivchar* Hashem” are enumerated, a phrase which does not appear again until this *mitzvah*. Furthermore, back in *parshat Re'eh*, we already found laws relating to bringing other produce to *ha-makom asher yivchar* Hashem. Similarly, the laws of *viduy ma'aser* should also have been recorded in *parshat Re'eh*, for the simple reason that all the other laws of the three-year cycle of *ma'aser sheni* are found there (see 14:22-29). Again we find a *mitzvah* which thematically belongs elsewhere. Yet for some reason, Hashem prefers to uproot these *mitzvot* from *parshat Re'eh* and record them instead as part of the finale of the entire speech. We can, therefore, ask two parallel questions. First, why were these *mitzvot* uprooted from where one would have intuitively put them and placed here, and second, why were these specific *mitzvot* chosen as the conclusion to Moshe's speech of *chukim* and *mishpatim*?

At their core, both of these *mitzvot* relate to thanking G-d for the Land of Israel, and how that concept is an underlying theme in Moshe's speech. Note how both *mikra bikkurim* and *viduy ma'aser* contain declarations of gratitude for the fertile land granted to us by G-d:

1. MIKRA BIKURIM

"You shall then recite: ...and G-d brought us to this place and gave us this land, a land flowing with milk and honey. Therefore, I now bring my first fruits of the soil which You have given me" (26:9-10).

2. VIDUY MA'ASER

"When you set aside your *ma'aser*...you shall declare before Hashem: I have [fulfilled all my obligations]... Look down from heaven and bless Your people Israel and the soil You have given us, a land flowing with milk and honey, as You swore to our fathers" (26:12-15).

Note as well how both declarations thank G-d not only for the Land but also recall His covenant with the *Avot* (which included G-d's original promise of the Land). This element emerges explicitly in *viduy ma'aser* (see quote above / 26:15), and is expressed more subtly in *mikra bikkurim*, as that proclamation reflects thanksgiving for G-d's fulfillment of his covenant at '*brit bein ha-betarim*' – when the land was promised to Avraham's offspring.

The primary purpose of the main speech was to teach Bnei Yisrael the various laws which they must keep when they enter the land. For example:

“And these are the *mitzva*, *chukim u-mishpatim* that G-d has commanded me to impart to you, to be observed in the Land that you are about to enter and conquer...” (6:1).

These observations suggest that *Sefer Devarim* intentionally 'saved' these two 'declarations' for the conclusion of the main speech, because both of these *mitzvot* relate to the need for *Am Yisrael* to recognize why G-d gave them the land of Israel. Hence, it becomes most appropriate that the final *mitzvot* of this speech include expressions of gratitude to G-d for the Land He has given us.

In this sense, one could understand the *mitzva* of *mikra bikkurim* in a slightly different light. Instead of viewing this *mitzvah* as a yearly thanksgiving to G-d for our fruits, it should be viewed instead as a yearly thanksgiving to G-d for the Land. In other words, we thank G-d for the Land and bring a sampling of our first fruits as a 'token of our appreciation'. [This may also explain why we quote *mikra bikkurim* in the *Haggadah* on *Pesach* as part of the *mitzvah* of retelling the story of *Yetziat Mitzrayim* and thanking G-d for His fulfillment of *brit bein ha-betarim*.]

Recalling G-d's covenant with the *Avot* serves another purpose, as well. The farmer not only thanks G-d for fulfilling His promise to our forefathers, but also reminds himself of the reason why G-d gave us the Land - to become a great nation to represent Him in the world. As such, these declarations carry a unique significance in that they emphasize the reason for keeping all the *mitzvot* of the main speech in *Sefer Devarim* – so that Bnei Yisrael become an '*am kadosh*' (a holy nation), a model for all nations to follow. Saying thank you at this critical time while standing before G-d in the *Beit Hamikdash* can leave a profound and lasting impression on the one making the declaration, inspiring him to continue to strive to fulfill the ultimate goal of *Am Yisrael*.

“At least someone thinks I'm funny” ~Elisha
“I have to” ~ Ana

M O D A O T

- **Oneg Friday night at 10:15 in Ziv 127-204.** Come hang out, eat food, listen to Torah, and make new friends this Friday night! Bring a friend!
- **Come to Mussar @ Brandeis! Shabbat Day at 3:30 PM in the Beit Midrash** A Mussar group generally consists of soul-searching individuals who want to develop their Middot. Mussar Group-Study is rooted in the core principles of Judaism's Mussar Tradition. As a follow-up to Mussar Group-Study,

practical tools are introduced based on the relevant topics being studied in order to apply the topics to daily living. The goal is to help, guide, and motivate all to improve the quality of our Middot in our interpersonal interactions and, by extension, improve the quality of our souls. Thus, we will be nurturing the good spirit of our souls and bettering this world! All are welcome to join and bring interested friends! For more information, contact Jacob Chatinover or Daniel Shimansky.

- **Coming Soon: FY-UC BOO Buddies!** First-Years, get excited because you will soon be assigned your BOO Buddy! A BOO Buddy is an upperclassman who is there to answer all your Brandeis questions, offer advice, and share some of their experienced knowledge with you.
- **Want to write for Torat Emet?** If you're interested in writing for Torat Emet and sharing your words of Torah please contact Lauren or Ronit!

(Rabbi Kaplowitz continued from page 1)

explanation of the *p'sukim*, I think it is a sad Rashi. After all, B'nei Yisrael make their declaration to Moshe only at the tale end of their 40 years of wandering in the desert. Why did it take them so long to show their strong desire and connection to Torah? Why was it not clear to Moshe until now that the entire nation wanted a part in Hashem's Torah?

The Sefat Emet, one of my favorite commentators on the parsha, offers a beautiful insight. He notes that the Torah does not use the term "*lo natan lachem de'ah* – G-d didn't give them knowledge until now." Rather it says "*lo natan lachem lev la-da'at* -- the Lord has not given you a **heart** to understand." On the surface it is strange to think that a relatively minor event like the transmission of the Torah to *shevet Levi* would evoke such a strong reaction; after all, this is the generation that experienced the Exodus from Egypt, the *kriyat Yam Suf* (splitting of the Sea), and the revelation at Mt. Sinai. Surely they must have known of G-d's greatness! But the Sefat Emet explains that it is not enough to experience an event. All the knowledge and experience we accumulate is worthless if we don't let it enter our hearts. It was only at the end of their journey that B'nei Yisrael were able to allow the experience of having lived in the shadow of G-d's presence penetrate their hearts. Only now, as Moshe is preparing for his own death and must give the Torah over to the next generation of leadership that the nation has the heart to understand – to truly understand – what this moment of transmission means.

The lesson for us is clear. It is not enough to participate in events, go to classes and stimulate our minds. We must enter everything with an open heart – with a readiness to be impacted in a deep spiritual and emotional way. Only then can we truly connect with Hashem and the world around us.

Rabbi Kaplowitz Fun Fact: Rabbi Kaplowitz once broke the land speed record...on a bike.

(Aviva Zadoff continued from page 1)

to the seven species. We only give *bikkurim* on the seven species. While for the rest of the land *mitzvot* have been extended by Chazal to all produce from the land, in the Mishna of *Bikkurim*, *bikkurim* is specifically restrained to the seven species.

Lastly, the obligation of *bikkurim* falls to the owner of the land and not the one who grew the fruit (like a lease holder or tenant). The other land tithes are the responsibility of those who grew the fruit and not the one who owns the land.

So, what does this teach us? What do all of these differences tell us about the *mitzvah* of *bikkurim*?

A good way to go about understanding the nature of the *mitzvah* is to look at the declaration we make when we give our *bikkurim*. One may think it would be about our thanks for the fruit that we now have, but in reality it is a historical view of how Hashem brought us to the land of Israel. The declaration in 26:3-11 is a history lesson from the time of Ya'akov and his family going down to Egypt to our exile and eventual entering the land of Israel.

This declaration explains an important key to understanding the *mitzvah* of *bikkurim*, it's not about the food it's about the land. While other land based *mitzvot* focus on the produce here we are recognizing that Hashem gave us the land of Israel and we must continue to thank Hashem for this incredible gift.

This understanding can also help us understand the specific stipulations put on this *mitzvah*. It must be given as a *korban* in the *Beit Hamikdash*, it is only given when we are in control of the land of Israel and have the *Beit Hamikdash*. According to Rav Elchanan Samot when we no longer have the *Beit Hamikdash* we are recognizing that Hashem is temporarily taking away the gift of the land of Israel. We also only give the seven species which are specific to the land of Israel and recognized as associated with Israel. And the land owner is responsible for this *mitzvah* because it is about Bnei Yisrael's ownership and thanks for the land of Israel.

Understanding the reasons behind the *mitzvah* of *bikkurim* is related to our appreciation for having *Eretz Yisrael* and a reaffirmation of Hashem's giving us the land. In reality *bikkurim* is something we can all celebrate and appreciate, something we all benefit from.

Aviva has a weekly "bad list." Make sure you don't get on it and suffer the consequences! Also, never trust anyone who takes advice from Top Chef.

Belief is a Verb

By Noah Fields '12

At the end of this week's *parsha*, Moses says "But Hashem did not give you a heart to know, or eyes to see, or ears to hear until this day." Now this is a weird thing to say. After all, they must have all had ears and eyes, especially since Moses just pointed out all the miracles that the Israelites witnessed. Even on a metaphorical level, this doesn't seem to work out. After all, if they were 'blind' to G-d's miracles, then why should G-d expect them to follow His laws. In almost any sense, it is hard to make sense of this statement.

Rav Twerski, through the words of Rav Meir Simcha, sheds light on this issue. Twerski translates, "Moses said to them, 'You know nothing other than an existence based on miracles ... so that you have no understanding that G-d is in nature'". Here Twerski affirms the assumption that the Israelites must have seen and recognized G-d's miracles. On the other hand, Twerski seems to emphasize the issue that people tend to leave G-d out of our mundane lives.

On the contrary, what this verse and Twerski are emphasizing is that G-d is in our everyday lives. It just isn't natural for us to see Him. Neither is it G-d given. If G-d were to, in contrast to this verse, let people see Him in our everyday life, they would have no choice but to obey Him. Since G-d wishes for people to have free will, He takes this away, leaving humans to seek Him. Even so, it would not be natural.

Like many emotions, belief is not static. People's beliefs change – or at least certain parts of it do. In complement to this change, at many times people seem to lose faith or hope. In truth though, as this verse suggests, they just do not exercise it. After all, if G-d can be found in any situation, then all it takes is some effort to find it and, thereby, believe. This suggests that belief is, in fact, a verb (metaphorically). People do not just 'have faith', they seek it out. They have to make an effort. This, for no other reason, is exactly why this verse follows a description of all the things G-d did to get us to recognize Him. If it takes G-d, the Supreme Ruler, all of that (read the *parsha* for the reference of 'that') to get us to believe, how much more must people do so.

Belief isn't something that will just enter our lives as a random visitor. Every single second – *mamash* every second – G-d is with us. We simply have to look for it.

Noah's favorite music is "YBC (of course)"

A Fulfilling Life

By Jacq Rothschild '10

In this week's *parsha* we find a very long list of fantastic things that G-d wants to bestow upon his people when they listen to the commandments and follow the Torah. We get goodies like overtaking our enemies, blooming gardens, lots of rain, popularity among other nations, etc., etc.

In the middle of this list however, we see the phrase "if you keep in the commandments of the Lord your G-d and walk in His ways." We have almost the exact same stipulation at the end of the list! Why does a warning need to appear in midst of the long list of blessings? The phrase seems a little unnecessary and out of place – after all, we did just hear a few *parshiot* worth of "listen to My commandments."

The *Sefer HaChinuch* explains that the phrase "walk in His ways" is not just a reminder, but a special commandment to actually walk in the ways of G-d: be exactly like Him. Take His good traits and make them your own. G-d is kind, so should you be kind. G-d is forgiving, slow to anger, righteous, full of *chesed*, loving, just, strong, etc. etc, so should you possess, and work to possess, these traits. The *Sefer HaChinuch* says that this is a 24/7 job, that every single person - men, women and children alike - should be doing, at all times.

So, we see that this isn't just another reminder to do all of G-d's *mitzvot*, but rather a commandment to literally walk in His ways. But still, isn't this lone commandment out of place in the long list of blessings? Not at all. Because this commandment is the greatest blessing of all. We, the Jewish people, get to receive the secret code to a better, fulfilling life: Torah. We get to emulate the greatest Role Model in the universe: G-d. Walking in G-d's ways is the ultimate blessing.

Jacq lives in a giant Ridgewood. You could walk in, have a class of suzuki, leave, and no one would notice.

SHORT VORTS

Being the Treasured Nation

By Dafna Gutfreund '12

Parshat Ki Tavo is an identifying chapter for the Jewish nation. After forty years of wandering through the desert, Bnei Yisrael is getting ready to go into *Eretz Yisrael*. But before entering the land, Bnei Yisrael must understand what is expected from them as a nation. It is crucial that Bnei Yisrael now realize the purpose of their existence and their fundamental relationship with G-d. In *perek 26, pesukim 18-19* Moshe reminds Bnei Yisrael that they are bound by the covenant of *Ma'amad Har Sinai*. As it says, "And the Lord has told you this day to be His own treasure, as He has promised you, and that you should keep all His commandments. And to make you high above all nations that He has made, in praise, and in name and in glory; and that you may be a holy people unto the Lord your G-d, as He has spoken." This covenant states that our purpose is to be a nation representing G-d. Meaning, since Hashem is holy, it is our responsibility to emulate G-d and to be a holy nation.

It is also our reward to be emissaries of Hashem. The Torah states in *parshat Ki Tavo* that if Bnei Yisrael keep the covenant and follow the *mitzvot*, then they will be blessed. They will be blessed in the city and the field, with their crops and animals; they will be protected from their enemies; rain will be provided for their land; and they will not need to borrow from other nations. Most importantly, Hashem will confirm them as a holy nation like He promised. *Parshat Ki Tavo* conversely states a comprehensive list of what will happen if Bnei Yisrael fails to keep the covenant. For example, Hashem will strike them with incurable boils on the knees and legs (28:35), a brazen nation will place them in siege which will cause them to eat the flesh of their children (28:53), and they will live in fear of other nations and be unsure of their livelihood (28:66). The list of curses is graphic and extremely explicit; it is much more detailed than the list of potential blessings. This is because the covenant itself is a blessing. That we are able to identify as a nation representing G-d is far more powerful than any one specific reward.

Bnei Yisrael is chosen to be an *Am Segulah*, a treasured nation, and to lead lives of *kedushah*, holiness. Bnei Yisrael spent forty years in the desert, during which they constantly benefitted from Hashem's miracles, repeatedly complaining and testing Hashem. Yet, they are still given the privilege to grow into a nation representing holiness, to serve Hashem, and now to enter the land of Israel. The Torah presents the *mitzvot*, the guidebook to the covenant with Hashem, but Bnei Yisrael must recognize the purpose of carrying out the *mitzvot*. We perform G-d's commandments when we dress, eat, and behave a certain way because it is our proud role as Jews to distinguish ourselves from other nations. It is our privilege to be an *Am Segulah* and represent G-d's holy treasure.

"I used to confuse Dafna and Flori all the time last year" ~ Ronit

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