

MITZVOT HATLUYOT BAARETZ **BIKKURIM**

GIVING THE BEST

The *mitzvah* of *bikkurim* requires one to bring his first שְׂבֻעַת הַמִּינִים fruit to the *Mikdash*, recite a short review of Jewish history, and then to present those fruits to the *kohen*. The midrash tells us – בְּרֵאשִׁית בְּרֵאשִׁית שְׂבֻעַת הַמִּינִים שְׂבֻעַת הַמִּינִים: one of the purposes of Creation was to give Jews the opportunity to bring *bikkurim*. What is so special about this *mitzvah*? How does this *mitzvah* capture the essence of our *avodah*? The question is compounded by the pomp and circumstance described by the Mishnayot in Masechet Bikkurim (Chapter 3) which accompanied those fulfilling the *mitzvah*.

“An ox would go in front of them, his horns bedecked with gold and with an olive-crown on its head. The flute would play before them until they would draw close to Jerusalem. When they drew close to Jerusalem they would send messengers in advance, and they would adorn their bikkurim. The governors and chiefs and treasurers [of the Temple] would go out to greet them, and according to the rank of the entrants, they would go forth. All the skilled artisans of Jerusalem would stand up before them and greet them saying, “Our brothers, men

of such and such a place, we welcome you in peace. The flute would play before them until they reached the Temple Mount. When they reached the Temple Mount even King Agrippas would take the basket and place it on his shoulder and walk as far as the Temple Court. When he got to the Temple Court, the Levites would sing the song: ‘I will extol You, O L-rd, for You have raised me up, and You have not let my enemies rejoice over me.’” (Tehillim 30:2)

Why all the excitement? Why all the fuss? Why do all the local farmers need to stop what they are doing to give them a *yashar koach*?

The Noam Elimelech teaches us the secret. How do I know which fruit to give as *bikkurim*? When the first little blossom of the first fruit appears, the owner ties a ribbon on it to remember which one was first. Imagine after all the blood, sweat and tears of months of plowing, watering, praying for rain, worrying about growth, the farmer finally merits to see the fruits of his labor. And what does he do? He gives it away to G-d and His servants.

This is the message of *bikkurim*: to give the most precious and beloved to G-d. At the moment that naturally we would be focused on our own needs and desires, we instead funnel our assets to G-d.

This also helps us understand the root difference between the *korban* of Kayin and of Hevel. Kayin, after all, had the idea first, so why was his *korban* “rejected”? The answer is in the text itself. Kayin brought from the fruit of the land, while Hevel brought from the choicest of his flock. Kayin did not bring his most precious, and that reflected a moral failure in his outlook in his service of G-d.¹

This is one of the purposes of Creation: to give our most precious, our best, to His service. Be it time, be it effort, be it money, be it resources. There are so many areas in which we can give of ourselves for spiritual and national pursuits. So many of our youth here in Israel give of their most precious years to learning, serving in the army, and dedicating their time to National Service, *sherut leumi*. We must learn from their sacrifice and commitment to our nation to live a life with the *bikkurim* value! Let us make sure that this Tu BiShvat, we rededicate ourselves to this end, and focus our attention to giving our very best to the One Above.

¹ See the Rambam’s beautiful formulation at the end of *Hilchot Issurei Mizbeach*.

Rabbi Shalom Rosner is a Rebbe at Yeshivat Kerem B’Yavneh and Rabbi of the Nofei HaShemesh community.

