

Parasha Meditation Ki Tavo

Devarim 26:1-29:8

By Rebbetzin Chana Bracha Siegelbaum

The Mitzvah of Bikurim in our Days – Dedicating the First and Best to Hashem

Introduction

The Glorious First Fruit Offerings During Temple Times

The mitzvah of the First Fruits Offerings (*Bikurim*) is the beginning and center-piece of *Parashat KiTavo*: “You shall bring the First-Fruits of your Land to the House of Hashem your G-d...”¹ During Temple times, the Jewish farmers would bring the first and the best of their crops as a donation to the Kohanim, who didn’t have their own land. “Those who lived near Jerusalem would bring figs and grapes (because they would not be spoiled by a short journey); those who lived far from Jerusalem would bring dried figs and raisins. An ox went before them with its horns overlaid with gold, and a crown of olive leaves upon its head. The flute was played before them until they approached Jerusalem. When they came close to Jerusalem, they sent messengers before them, and they would decorate their First-Fruits...”² “The flute was played before them until they reached the Temple Mount. Once they reached the Temple Mount, even Agrippas the King would carry a basket on his shoulder and go in as far as the *Azarah* (Temple courtyard). Once they reached the *Azarah*, the Levites would sing, ‘I will praise You, O G-d, for You have raised me up, and You have not allowed my enemies to rejoice over me!’³ Immediately following the holiday of Shavuot, the farmers would rejoice by dedicating the beginning of their fruit harvest to Hashem.”⁴

Dedicating my Greatest Desire to Hashem – through the First Fruit Offering

When a person goes down to his field and sees a fig that has ripened, he ties a piece of straw around it and declares: ‘this is *Bikurim*’⁵ The entire year, we weeded, composted, watered, pruned and removed worms from our fruit trees. When we finally experience the fruits of our hard labor, seeing our first fig ripening, this is so exciting, special and desirable, that we just want to gobble up this delicious fruit then and there. Such desire is described by the prophet as follows: “as the first-ripe fig before the summer, which when one looks upon it, while it is yet in his hand, he eats it up.”⁶ Now as always, the week of *Parashat Kitavo* is the peak of the

¹ *Shemot* 23:19.

² *Mishnah Bikurim*, Chapter 3, *Mishnah* 3.

³ *Tehillim* 30:2.

⁴ *Mishnah Bikurim*, Chapter 3, *Mishnah* 4.

⁵ *Mishna Bikurim* Chapter 3, *Mishnah* 1.

⁶ *Yesha'yahu* 28:4.



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fig season. Oh these figs are so deliciously sweet, that I'm embarrassed to admit, but sometimes I wake up to just run down to my garden and enjoy. However, I look forward to the time B"H soon when I will have to restrain my desire to indulge in all our hard work the entire year, and instead tie a string around this most precious fig, to dedicate my greatest desire to Hashem, for the mitzvah of *Bikurim*!

Entering the Temple with our Fruit-basket

"It shall be, when you enter the Land which Hashem your G-d is giving you for an inheritance, and you possess it and begin to set up permanent residence in it. Then you shall take all the fruit of the ground, which you shall bring from your land that Hashem your G-d is giving you; you shall put it into a basket, and you shall go to the place which Hashem your G-d will choose as a residence for His Divine Name."⁷ When entering the Temple with our fruit-basket, facing the Kohen, we will recite a declaration of gratitude to Hashem for bestowing His blessings upon *Eretz Yisrael!*

Fulfilling the Mitzvah of *Bikurim* in our Days

Knowing that the holy Torah is eternal; as we learn from the Thirteen Principles of Belief: "This Torah will never be exchanged;"⁸ then, how do we fulfill the mitzvah of *Bikurim* today when we have neither a worshipping Kohen, nor a Temple, or an altar? Even today we can fulfill the mitzvah of *Bikurim* by dedicating the beginning of every matter to Hashem. The body follows the head. The Netivot Shalom gives an example of why the beginning of everything is so important. If we write down the number zero, no matter how many zeros we add to this first zero, the entire number will still have no value. However, if we only add a number one in the beginning, then each and every zero adds to the total number.⁹ Therefore, by dedicating the first to Hashem, we can illuminate and elevate our entire existence.¹⁰

Consecrating the First and Best of Everything to Hashem

The first of everything is always the most exciting. Therefore, the purpose of the First Fruit Offering is for every Jew to give over that which is most beloved and precious for himself to Hashem. For example, the first-born child was originally dedicated to Temple service,¹¹ the first of the *chalah* offering,¹² and so the first born kosher animal.¹³ Also today, we are supposed to dedicate the beginning of every day – when we are full of energy and excitement – to Hashem through prayer, before beginning our day with any other activities. While anticipating the return of Temple times, I like to practice the First Fruit Offering, by thanking Hashem profusely for the produce and sharing my shiny fruits with Rabbis, teachers and students alike. I also try to sanctify the beginning of my day for holiness, thanksgiving and prayer.

⁷ Devarim 26:1-2.

⁸ Rambam, *the Thirteen Principles of Emunah*, Principle 9.

⁹ Netivot Shalom, *Parashat Kitavo*, page 157

¹⁰ *Chelkat Yehoshua, Articles*, p. 19.

¹¹ *Shemot* 13:2

¹² *Bamidbar* 15:20.

¹³ *Devarim* 18:4.



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Meditation

This meditation is not really a meditation, but more of a meditative practice to be incorporated in your daily life routine. It gives you guidelines of how to continuously dedicate the first and the best to Hashem.

1. When you awake in the morning – as soon as you open your eyes, thank Hashem for restoring your soul. Try to infuse your *Modeh Ani* prayer with the excitement and thankfulness to Hashem for this new day. Add your personal thankful prayer as you face Hashem upon rising from your bed.

2. Dedicate your first bite of food in the morning to Hashem, by taking a deep breath and then reciting the following: *“For the sake of the unity of the Holy One with His Shechinah, I do not eat only for the sake of giving pleasure for my body, G-d forbid, but for the sake of maintaining my body healthy and strong to be able to serve Hashem.”*¹⁴ The Biala Rebbe¹⁵ teaches that if we make this conscious intention before our meal, then even if in the middle we get distracted and start eating for selfish pleasures, still because we had a pure intent to begin with, our original objective is never nullified, and our entire eating goes after our original intention at the beginning of the meal.

3. When you buy something new save it to use first time for Shabbat or for the upcoming holiday, to rejoice with it for the sake of Hashem. This applies both to a new fruit, a new interesting kind of food, or a new garment.

4. When you go shopping, as you are waiting on line before finalizing your purchase recite: *“For the sake of the unity of the Holy One with His Shechinah, may everything I buy be vessels for performing mitzvot!* Whenever possible try to buy something really special as a gift to make someone else happy.

5. When you pick your fruits, flowers, herbs, or veggies, try to give some of your nicest produce to a person in need.

6. Before beginning your exercise routine take a deep breath and recite *“For the sake of the unity of the Holy One with His Shechinah, I exercise in order to maintain my body healthy and strong for the sake of serving Hashem.”*

7. When you go to sleep, before reciting the bedtime *Shema*, ask Hashem that your sleep will be deep and sound to give you strength to awake excited to serve Him first thing in the morning!

¹⁴ Rabbi Elimelech of Lizhensk, *The Book of the Conduct of the Righteous*.

¹⁵ Rabbi Ben Tzion Rabbinowitz from Switzerland, *Shelita*.



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Notes

The Biala Rebbe explains based on his father's teachings the *Divrei Bina* that in every matter a person needs to make a conscious effort that its beginning should be for the sake of heaven, for everything goes after the beginning. In heaven they calculate mainly the beginning of the thoughts of a person, whether through fulfilling the Torah and the Mitzvot, or whether through physical matters, the beginning of intention needs to be for Hashem. When we have pure intentions in our every deed, to dedicate its beginning to Hashem, we fulfill the mitzvah of *Bikurim* even more than during Temple times!¹⁶

¹⁶Rabbi Ben Tzion Rabinowitz, *Shulchan Adam Mekaper, A Person's Table Atones*, Chapter 5.



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About Us



Rebbetzin Chana Bracha Siegelbaum

Rebbetzin Chana Bracha Siegelbaum, a native of Denmark, is Founder and Director of Midreshet B'erot Bat Ayin. She holds a Bachelor of Education in Bible and Jewish Philosophy from Michlala Jerusalem College for Women, and a Masters of Art in Jewish History from Touro College. Chana Bracha also began her practice as a spiritual healer through Emuna, tefila and energy work. For more than two decades Chana Bracha has taught Bible studies with special emphasis on women's issues in Israel and the United States. She creates curricula emphasizing women's

spiritual empowerment through traditional Torah values. Midreshet B'erot Bat Ayin located in the Judean Hills of Israel offers a unique program to women of all ages and backgrounds to learn in a holistic Torah study environment that nurtures the mind, body and soul. Intensive textual study of Tanach, Halacha and Chassidut are woven together with creative spiritual expression, and connection with the land of Israel through organic gardening, herbology, Jewish sources of healing and sustainable living. Classes in Jewish mysticism, Chassidism and Jewish meditation are directed at the spiritual thirst so prominent in our times.

*In 2010 Rebbetzin Chana Bracha published her first book, *Women at the Crossroads: A Woman's Perspective on the Weekly Torah Portion*.*

Chana Bracha has a married son and several granddaughters. She lives with her husband and younger son on the land of the Judean hills, Israel.

If you are interested in:

Midreshet B'erot Bat Ayin contact info@berotbatayin.org or in Spiritual Healing with Rebbetzin Chana Bracha, please contact her at director@berotbatayin.org

or visit her blog: <http://rebbetzinchanabracha.blogspot.com/2010/11/emunah-healing-for-women.html>

Midreshet B'erot Bat Ayin – Holistic Torah Study for Women on the Land of Israel

At Midreshet B'erot Bat Ayin, we weave together Torah studies with creative spiritual expression, connecting with the Land of Israel, and healthy, organic lifestyles. In the heart of the Judean Hills, with its serene beauty, our students experience an approach to Judaism that bridges mind, body and soul. Midreshet B'erot Bat Ayin is designed as a micro-community within the Village of Bat Ayin where women of all ages and backgrounds engage in intense Torah learning as part of an integrated, participatory approach to Torah living.

Come Learn With Us!

Beginner and advanced levels are offered for women of all ages and religious backgrounds. Whether your interest in Judaism has recently been ignited, or you are seeking a wider perspective, Midreshet B'erot Bat Ayin offers the opportunity to improve your learning skills while strengthening your commitment to Judaism within the parameters of Halachah – all while engaging your inner creative spirituality, working the Land, and maintaining a healthy lifestyle.

Support Our School!

You have the unique opportunity to help us continue to build and amplify the light of Torah on the Land of Israel. With your help we can increase our ability to provide women an extraordinary Torah environment where they can build a solid Jewish foundation which will have an impact for generations to come.