

Spiritual Healing in the Torah

By Rebbetzin Chana Bracha

Parashat Ki Tavo

Why Would Performing the Mitzvah of Bikkurim (First Fruit Offering) Enable Us to Merit the Land?

In the Land of Israel, the Physical and the Spiritual Realms are Intertwined

Since my last international speaking tour just prior to COVID-19, it seems that so many of our friends and supporters have made Aliyah, and even more are working on making Aliyah. In fact, some 70,000 new immigrants from 95 countries made aliyah in 2022. It was the largest number of olim to arrive in 23 years and a dramatic increase over the previous year when only 28,600 new immigrants were welcomed. COVID-19 generated a paradigm shift that made us face our mortality, contemplate the purpose of life, and our role in the world. Many Torah-observant Jews realized that the true place for a Jew is to live in the Promised Land. Here in Israel, even the mundane and earthly realm is imbued with spirituality as it states, "A Land in which you do not eat bread in measure, you will not be lacking anything in it" (*Devarim* 8:9). This teaches us that when the Jewish people live in the Land of Israel, we may merit to be on such a level, that acquisition of wealth even luxuries won't damage our true spiritual perfection. Rather, our wealth will help us increase strength and spiritual perfection in Hashem's straight path. Through physical abundance, our spiritual level will rise (Rav Kook, *Ein Aya, Berachot* 6:15). There has been a gap and disunity between body and soul, holy and mundane, ever since the magnificent physical building of our holy Temple exuding the highest spiritual light was destroyed. Throughout our exiles, the spiritual realm has been disengaged from the physical to the extent that teachings such as the Talmudic statement that a *Talmid Chacham* (Torah scholar) may not walk in public with a stain on his clothing (*Babylonian Talmud, Shabbat* 114a) were given little weight. Since the founding of the State of Israel, we began the process of integrating the physical within the spiritual realm. It's hard to describe how this principle plays out in our daily day life in Israel. All I can say is that when living in Israel you really experience that every tree, flower, and fruit is holy. As I look out of my window behind my computer I see my neighbor's holy grape-wines winding themselves along our laundry line on the backdrop of the most brilliant, bluest sky. Yes, in Land of Israel heaven and earth are truly one!

Why Would Performing the Mitzvah of Bikkurim Enable Us to Merit the Land?

We usually read *Parashat Ki Tavo* at the beginning of the fig harvest, the fruit which is especially singled out for the first fruit offering as it states, A person goes down into his field and sees a fig that has ripened. He winds a reed around it for a sign and declares: "This is the **בִּכּוּרִים**/*bikkurim* – "first fruit" (*Mishnah Bikkurim* 3:1; Rashi, *Devarim* 26:2). We're excitedly awaiting the time to be able to perform this mitzvah from the Torah with the shiny fruits of our labor:

סַפֵּר דְּבָרִים פְּרִקַן כּוֹ פְּסוּקָא וְהָיָה אֵל תְּבוּאָה אֶל הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר הָשֵׁם אֱלֹהֶיךָ נָתַן לָךְ נַחֲלָה וְיִרְשָׁתָהּ וְיִשְׁבְּתָהּ בָּהּ: (ב) וְלָקַחְתָּ מִרְאשֵׁית כָּל פְּרֵי הָאֲדָמָה אֲשֶׁר תְּבִיא מֵאֶרֶץ אֲשֶׁר הָשֵׁם אֱלֹהֶיךָ נָתַן לָךְ וְשַׂמְתָּ בַטֶּבֶל וְהִלַּכְתָּ אֶל הַמָּקוֹם אֲשֶׁר יִבְחַר הָשֵׁם אֱלֹהֶיךָ לְשֹׁכֵן שְׁמוֹ שָׁם:

"It shall be, when you come into the land which Hashem, your G-d, gives you for an inheritance, and you possess it and settle in it, that you shall take of the first of all the fruit of the earth, which you will bring from your land, which Hashem, your G-d, is giving you. Then you shall put [them] into a basket and go to the place which Hashem, your G-d, will choose to have His Name dwell there" (*Devarim* 26:1-2).

The authoritative halachic midrash, Sifrei, teaches that through performing the mitzvah of bikkurim we will merit of entering the land [of Israel]" (Sifrei, *Devarim, Parashat Ki Tavo* 1).

Why would performing the mitzvah of *bikkurim* (first fruit) enable us to merit the land? Moreover, since this mitzvah could only be performed after the lengthy process of conquering and dividing the land, which lasted 14 years, how could it bring about entering the land that happened several years prior?

Acquiring the Two Foundations of a Jew: Kedusha (Holiness) and Emunah (Faith)

Netivot Shalom explains that to merit the Land of Israel we need to acquire two main foundations of serving Hashem: *Emunah* (faith) and *Kedusha* (holiness). Emunah implies believing that only Hashem runs the world, and none of our own efforts, strengths, or the might of our hands bring about anything without Hashem willing it. Kedusha is to subjugate our cravings and hand over our enjoyment and lusts to Hashem. When the Temple will be rebuilt B"H, I will infuse myself with holiness, as I go down to my orchard and tie a red string around one of the most succulent figs. I will be subjugating my base desire to gobble it up myself, while I proclaim that it is bikkurim. Offering the first and the best to Hashem will ingrain my emunah that absolutely nothing can exist or grow without Hashem bringing it into creation. During our wandering in the wilderness, we by default acquired the two foundations of kedusha and emunah by quenching our thirst through the holy, miraculous well of Miriam and receiving bread directly from heaven. Whereas regular food arouses lust, eating the manna directly from Hashem's hand imbued us with the highest holiness. The wilderness wandering experience moreover strengthened our emunah by imprinting within our consciousness how no one but Hashem led us through individual providence.

Through the mitzvah of Bikkurim we Can Enter the Physical Realm of the Land while Maintaining our levels of Emunah and Kedusha

When we were on the verge of entering the Land of Israel, we were afraid of losing our high levels of kedusha and emunah of the wilderness, as we would have to work within the physical realm to sustain ourselves. When doing all the work necessary to grow the fruits of the land, it would be much harder to maintain the clear belief that everything emanates from Hashem, rather than from the power of our own hands. Therefore, Hashem gave us the mitzvah of bikkurim to enable us to enter the Land of Israel and be occupied in earthly pursuits while maintaining our levels of emunah and kedusha. Although we work so hard plowing, sowing, weeding, composting, etc. for the fruit of our labor, the mitzvah of bikkurim - offering the first fruits to Hashem - ensures our emunah that "it is Hashem our G-d, who gives us strength to make wealth..." Rather than being enticed by the erroneous belief that "My strength and the might of my hand has accumulated this wealth for me." (*Devarim* 8:17-18). Moreover, our willingness to hand over to Hashem our cravings to grab the first fruit for ourselves - which naturally is the object of our greatest desire - elevates us to the level of holiness. Thus, by offering our earthly goods to Hashem through the mitzvah of bikkurim we can strengthen our clarity of emunah and sanctify ourselves in kedusha while being involved in earthly pursuits. Therefore, this mitzvah enables us to merit to enter the land of Israel.

Overcoming the two Worst Husks Opposing our Jewish Essence: Emunah and Kedusha

The declaration that accompanies the mitzvah of bikkurim establishes the two foundations of Judaism: Emunah and kedusha. The declaration opens by mentioning their two opposing forces:

“You shall call out and say before Hashem, your G-d, ‘An Aramean [sought to] destroy my forefather, and he went down to Egypt and sojourned there with a small number of people, and there, he became a great, mighty, and numerous nation...’” (*Devarim* 26:5). The Aramean refers to Lavan, who embodied the husk of כְּפִירָה/*kefirah* – ‘heresy,’ which is the opposite of emunah. He claimed that everything belonged to himself rather than to Hashem, saying, “The daughters are my daughters, and the sons are my sons, and the animals are my animals, and all that you see is mine” (*Bereishit* 31:43). Therefore, we proclaim that Lavan is destroyed and lost as the word אָבָד/*oved* can be understood to not only refer to Lavan’s desire to destroy Israel but also to Lavan’s own destruction. Mentioning the Egyptian exile refers to the husk of unholiness, for Egypt is known as the nakedness of the land – the source of unholy lusts. In the bikkurim recital, we distance ourselves from the two worst husks: Lavan and Egypt – who are diametrically opposed to the two main foundations of the Torah, emunah and kedusha. Thus, through the mitzvah of bikkurim, we can maintain our spiritual level while being involved in working the physical land. Only in the Land of Israel does heaven and earth meet. This is alluded to in the first word of *Parashat Ki Tavo* is וְהָיָה /*vehaya* – ‘It shall be.’ The letters of this word are the initials of יִשְׂמְחוּ הַשָּׁמַיִם וְתִגַּל הָאָרֶץ (The heavens will rejoice and the earth will exult). When a Jew elevates all the earthly, it arouses happiness above. This is the work of these days of teshuva, during the month of Elul, through which we Jews must elevate everything we have to Hashem. Thereby, we can establish, “When you enter the land...” – elevating the aspect of entering the land and the earthly to the source of holiness (Based on *Netivot Shalom* on *Devarim* pp.160-162).

EmunaHealing Exercise for Integrating Emunah and Kedusha Available in the Land of Israel

1. Close your eyes and settle down on the ground or relax in your chair. Take several deep breaths and center yourself. Allow all thoughts to pass through you, noticing them without judgment.
2. Tap into your ancestral memory or imagine you are wandering in the wilderness together with your fellow Jews. As Hashem takes care of you, leads you through His cloud of glory and pillar of fire, and feeds you the ethereal manna, allow yourself to feel how you are completely enveloped by the emunah that everything is from G-d. Enjoy this carefree feeling of letting go of all control to Hashem. All is G-d and G-d is all, you are part of this ‘allness’ – this oneness as you glide through the desert following Hashem’s lead.
3. Imagine receiving the manna from heaven and ingesting this spiritually nurturing nourishment. You are completely free of any earthly cravings as you enjoy your divine meal. Can you feel how kedusha enters you with every single bite? Revel in the holiness you experience within you, feeling light and illuminated.
4. Soon you will be leaving your safe and holy incubation, and entering an earthly place, where you will fight wars, till the earth, and be sustained by the fruits of your labor.
5. Get in touch with the challenge of remembering that everything is Hashem, even as we employ our own efforts to succeed. How can we maintain the clarity that it is Hashem and only Hashem Who gives us strength to make wealth and succeed in any of our endeavors? Feel the tension and the challenge to recognize that no matter how wise and clever we are to bring about successful abundance, these results are ONLY due to Hashem.
6. Allow yourself to experience the feeling of your earthly desires like when munching on juicy grapes or a crisp steak, or any other favorite food of yours. Imagine the feeling of wanting more and the challenge of eating slowly and chewing every bite.

7. Recall that through the power of the most uplifted holiness of the land of Israel, a Jew can elevate all earthly matters to Hashem. Envision yourself being in the holy land of Israel right now. Visualize the rolling hills, the intensity of the blueness of the sky, and the beauty of the fruits of the land. Breathe in all of this beauty through which the physical and the spiritual realms unite.

8. The physical land of Israel is imbued with holiness. In Israel every rock and pebble, every grain of sand every drop of dew is holy. Breathe into the notion that in the land of Israel, you can elevate the physical realm to be included in the spiritual.

9. Recite the first word of *Parashat Ki Tavo* is **וְהָיָה** /vehaya - "It shall be" softly, barely audibly. Repeat it as many times as you like, breathe into this word **וְהָיָה** /vehaya **וְהָיָה** /vehaya **וְהָיָה** /vehaya. This word is the initials of **וְתִגַּל הָאָרֶץ וְיִשְׂמְחוּ הַשָּׁמַיִם** /yismechu hashamayim vetagel ha'aretz (The heavens will rejoice, and the earth will exult). Tap into the unity between heaven and earth that can be experienced in the Land of Israel. Breathe into it and get in touch with your desire to truly live a life of holiness and faith in the Land of Israel. You may open your eyes when you are ready to return to your reality wherever you are right now.