

SICHA SUMMARY

Likkutei Sichos, Vol. 34

Tavo, Sicha 1

The Context:

The parshah of Ki Savo opens with the mitzvah of bikkurim, the first fruits that a Jewish landowner is obligated to bring to the Beis Hamikdash and donate to the kohanim. The verse begins, ““When you enter the land that G-d, your G-d, is giving you as an inheritance, you must take possession of it and settle in it. Of all the first fruits of the earth that you harvest from your land that God, your God, is giving you... place these fruits in a basket... (Devarim 26:1-2)

The Sifri comments on this verse that the word “when” implies an immediate commandment. Meaning, the obligation to bring bikkurim applied immediately when the Jewish people entered the Land of Israel.

The Talmud Bavli, however, echoed by Rashi on the Torah, maintains that whenever the verse uses the expression “take possession

and settle” it means to limit the application of the command until after the land has been conquered, apportioned, and settled. This process took fourteen years under the leadership of Yehoshua. Thus, the mitzvah of bikkurim, according to this approach, was not applicable until fourteen years after the people entered the Land of Israel.

The Question:

How does the Sifri reach its conclusion that bikkurim are immediately applicable at odds with the generally accepted principle that “take possession and settle” implies after the fourteen-year period of conquest and settling?

A Possible Explanation:

When the Torah places the limitation of “after conquest and settling” as the earliest start date for a certain mitzvah, that can be understood in two ways: 1) no individual is obligated in the mitzvah until the entire land has been settled by the entire nation; 2) each individual becomes obligated in the mitzvah when they have acquired their individual portion.

In general, this limitation is understood in the first way. But the Sifri is suggesting that regarding bikkurim, we interpret the “conquest and settle” in the second way, on an individual level, since the verse uses the word “when” which implies “immediately.” Thus, the Sifri is not disregarding the phrase “conquer and settle;” it is understanding it slightly differently, due to the opening clause of the verse.

Rejection of Possible Explanation:

According to the above explanation, an individual would not be required to bring bikkurim until they conquered the portion of the land that was assigned to them, and received their family’s plot. Yet the Sifri still says that the obligation is “immediately,” before any form of conquest or settling. It seems that the Sifri disregards any limitation of conquest and settling, even though the verse explicitly invokes this limitation!

It appears, therefore, that the Sifri conceives of bikkurim as being distinct from other land-based mitzvos in that they are not contingent on the conquest and settling of the land at all. That is, immediately upon entering the land, the mitzvah of bikkurim applies. Technically, however, bikkurim cannot be brought until an individual owns the land that he reaps the fruit from. Thus, the need for conquest and settling on an individual basis is just a procedural necessity to enable one to bring bikkurim,

but the obligation applies immediately upon entering the land.

This is not just theoretical. When the Jewish people entered the land, they first conquered Yericho and the portion of Doshna was immediately given to the descendants of Yisro, prior to the apportioning of the land which took place seven years later. According to the Talmud Bavli, this is immaterial to the obligation of bikkurim. The residents of Doshnah would still not be obligated until fourteen years later. But according to the Sifri, they would be obligated immediately.

The Deeper Dimension:

The mitzvah of bikkurim expresses the ideal of gratitude and thankfulness to G-d for the abundance of the land that He has given us. The two timelines for the obligation of bikkurim allude to two forms of gratitude.

To give bikkurim immediately upon entering the land means to express gratitude involuntarily, as an immediate reaction to the gifts of life, without articulated reflection. This is the thankfulness of Modeh Ani which we say immediately upon awakening. We do not pause to consider the reasons for our gratitude, we instinctively thank G-d the moment we are conscious.

To give bikkurim after the conquest and settling of the land means to contemplate the value of the gifts that G-d has given us, to enumerate each blessing, to appreciate

the magnitude and grandeur of G-d's world. This takes time, patience, and thought for the gratitude to become internalized and not just instinctual. This is the thankfulness we express throughout the morning prayers, from the individual blessings, to the blessing of thanks in the Shemonah Esrei, to the last verse "Indeed, the righteous will thankfully acknowledge Your name."

The fact that we often read this portion in the week of the 18th of Elul, the birthday of the Baal Shem Tov and the Alter Rebbe, is significant. The Baal Shem Tov taught the Jewish people how to express the first kind of gratitude, to give expression to their innate faith and love of G-d. The Alter Rebbe taught the Jewish people had to integrate their thankfulness through contemplation, thus making their gratitude an authentic part of who they are.
