

SICHA SUMMARY

Likkutei Sichos, Vol. 29

Tavo, Sicha 1

The Context:

Regarding the mitzvah of Bikkurim, bringing the first fruits to the Kohanim in Jerusalem, Rambam writes:

“The first fruits must be brought in a container, as *ibid.*:2 states: ‘And you shall place them in a container.’... When a person brings the first fruits in a metal container, the priest takes them and returns the container to its owner. If he brings them in a reed or grass basket or the like, both the first fruits and the basket should be given to the priests. If the first fruits become impure, the baskets should not be given to the priests. (Bikkurim, 3:7-8)

The Question:

The source for this law is a Mishnah, which offers the rationale that a wealthy person brings their fruit in an expensive basket that they do not wish to part with, but the poor person is not attached to their inexpensive reed basket, and so it belongs to the Kohen. But Rambam does not mention the

economic status of the giver at all in this law — only the material of the vessel itself. This implies that the reasoning is not connected to the status of the giver — rich or poor — but to the material of the baskets themselves. What could explain this distinction between metal and reed baskets?

The Explanation:

There are several ways to understand the relationship between the obligation to give the basket to the kohen with the general mitzvah of Bikkurim:

1. The basket is only needed to transport the fruit to the Beis Hamikdash. Once there, the basket is a separate entity from the fruit. The obligation to gift the basket is separate and distinct from the giving of the fruit.
2. The giving of the fruit triggers a secondary obligation to give the basket as well. Yet they remain two distinct acts of giving, the basket and fruit are two distinct entities.
3. The giving of the basket is part of the obligation to give the fruit, they are a single act of giving.

Rambam implies a fourth possibility: the basket and the fruit are seen as one cohesive item. The basket cannot be separated from the fruit, legally, they comprise one unit. Therefore, when the fruit is given to the Kohen, the basket, too, naturally is given to the Kohen. There is no distinct obligation to give the basket, since the basket and the fruit are one.

There is an exception to this rule, however, and that is the scenario of metal baskets. Metal baskets are so distinct from the fruit they carry that they are only seen as part of the offering during the process of transporting the fruit, but their dissimilarity cleaves them from the fruit in the context of giving. Reed baskets, however, are similar to the fruit they carry, therefore they are seen as naturally constituting one entity which automatically is transferred to the kohen in one act of giving.

This explains why Rambam does not make the distinction of the Mishnah between rich and poor, since that is not the operating

principle behind the law of metal and reed baskets. Instead, it is the material itself which explains the distinction.

The Deeper Dimension:

The law of the baskets leads to a paradox: The educational goal of Bikkurim is to offer the first and best of our fruits to G-d. Why, then, are only baskets made of inferior material included in the gift, but not the baskets made of more valuable and durable material?

Spiritually, the mitzvah of Bikkurim alludes to the soul, which is G-d's "first" and finest "fruit." The objective of the soul is not to remain in a pristine, Heavenly setting, but to descend to this world, to become embodied in an inferior "reed basket," and to transform this lowly material into an integrated home for G-d. The merging of the fruit/soul with the basket/body is a necessary degradation, only for the sake of transformation and, ultimately, the ascension to the Beis Hamikdash.
