

SICHA SYNOPSIS

L'chaim Weekly

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Tavo , Sicha 1

This week's Torah portion, Ki Tavo, opens with the commandment of bikurim - first fruits. "You shall put it in a basket... and the priest will take the basket out of your hand."

Closer study of the Torah's laws of bikurim reveals that the presentation of the basket (usually made out of wicker) to the kohen (priest) was an integral part of the commandment itself.

Interestingly, while the fruits that were brought were only the choicest, and only selected from the seven varieties with which the land of Israel is praised, the basket that was used for them was made of a common material.

This seeming contradiction in the commandment of bikurim contains an allusion to the descent of the soul from the higher spheres and its incarnation in a physical body down below.

The fruits of the bikurim are symbolic of the soul; the basket is the corporeal body. Handing the basket to the priest represents the purpose for which the soul made this drastic descent.

In general, the first fruits are symbolic of the Jewish people; more specifically, of the G-dly soul as it exists Above, completely transcendent of the physical world.

G-d's plan, however, is for this rarefied soul to become enclothed in a body, a coarse and lowly "vessel" which contains it, as it were.

This vessel makes it difficult for the soul to express its connection with G-d, even to the point of obscuring its true mission in the world. Again, just as in the commandment of bikurim, the holy and superior "fruit" is contained and even constrained within the confines of a simple and unpretentious "basket."

Chasidut provides the reason for this, explaining that the descent of the soul into a physical body is a "descent for the purpose of ascent": It is precisely through its sojourn on the physical plane, having to confront the difficulties of this world and overcome them, that the essence of

the soul is revealed and a higher level of spirituality attained - much higher than could ever be reached without experiencing this descent in the first place.

In principle, "fruits" alone are not enough; the objective of the soul's descent is "fruits within a basket."

The soul's growth is accomplished through the performance of practical commandments, which can only be done with the help of the "vessel" - the physical body. For in truth, the soul was already filled with love and awe of G-d before it came down into the material world; the only change it experiences upon finding itself in a body is that it can now do physical commandments, something that was previously impossible. Thus the soul is rendered capable of elevating the physical world and turning it into holiness - the intent of all of creation.

Adapted from Likutei Sichot of the Rebbe, Volume 29.
