

Keeping up with our gap year programmes in Israel...

Shalom from Israel!

Hachshara 5775 has begun! Last Sunday our group of British (and Dutch) BA-niks with whom we will be spending a year met at Ben Gurion airport!

Since we've arrived, we've had tiyulim such as grape picking in the Gush. We have seen spectacular stalactite caves and have learnt some of the history of the '67 war, standing where it took place on the route from Tel Aviv to Yerushalayim!

Hachshara allows you to go with some incredible people to the most amazing places in the most awesome country in the world! Being with friends who are in the same situations as you and completely understand the changes you go through as you begin a new phase of life is an opportunity not to be missed.

Make sure you visit soon and keep on keeping up with Hachshara!

From Ami Hill

Ami Hill is in Shevet Na'aleh, and is on Hachsharat Torani in Yeshivat Hakotel,



תנועת בני עקיבא
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ושבתה הארץ
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SHABBAT
LASHEM

Volume 20 · No 49
18th Elul 5774
13th September 2014

Parshat Ki Tavo

Declaration of Dedication

Ollie Collins

The beginning of this weeks' *parasha* introduces the concept of *bikkurim* – first fruits – to the Jewish nation. What is this *mitzvah* all about? One of the defining characteristics of *bikkurim* is that it is a “*reishit*” – a first. There are several other *mitzvot* given this title; why, then is it placed here and not with other “*reishit*” *mitzvot* such as *terumat ma'aser* - tithes?

The Rambam (Moreh Nevuchim 3:39) and Sefer Ha'Chinuch (*mitzvah* 91) agree that the ‘first’ of everything represents recognition that G-d is the Master of all our possessions, so for that reason we have these *mitzvot*. But why is *Bikkurim* different?

The Torah states (Devarim 26:2):

“That you shall take of the first of every fruit of the ground that you bring in from your Land that Hashem, your G-d, gives you, and you shall put it in a basket and go to the place that Hashem, your G-d, will choose, to make His Name rest there.”

The simplicity of the commandment seems to shine through from the *pasuk*; one immediately takes their first fruits and gives them straight to the Kohen who offers them up to Hashem. But there is something quite peculiar about it. A few *pesukim* later it is revealed that this *mitzvah* comes with something that explains why it's found here and not someplace else. Atypically to other *mitzvot* in the Torah, *Bikkurim* comes with a declaration.

In order to understand the reasoning behind this affirmation, one must delve deeper into the purpose of *Bikkurim*. One would serve their first fruits to Hashem to show that we have ultimate dedication to Him. We dedicate everything around us, and more importantly our *parnassah*, our livelihoods towards serving G-d. This is something quite hard to comprehend, especially nowadays, and relies on complete trust and faith towards Hashem.

The reason we do this can be understood when examining the actual words of the declaration and links back to the reason of having the declaration in the first place. It discusses the events of an “Aramean who tried to destroy my forefather” who Rashi interprets as the evil Lavan who tricked and pursued Yaakov, to being enslaved in Egypt, ultimately leading to the redemption from Egypt by Hashem to the Promised Land.

This declaration gives a rough outline of key moments throughout Jewish history where through persecution and destruction, Hashem has saved us and brought us into the land of Israel. This shows us that the Land could never have been given to Bnei Yisrael without G-d's loving intervention. This is echoed at the end of the declaration where we're brought back to first fruits and realise why we devote ourselves to Hashem. Therefore, we learn the uniqueness of this *mitzvah* and declaration and that the main reason for it is to be an opportunity for owners of land to thank G-d for the gift of the land. In this case, declaration corresponds to dedication and I think it's important to note that even now we can show our commitment to Hashem by taking time to thank G-d for all we have including the Land of Israel.

Ollie Collins is in Shevet Hagevurah and was a Madrich on Gimmel Machane 5774.

Celebrating a simcha? A special birthday coming up? Include Bnei Akiva in your celebrations by sponsoring Shabbat Lashem! For details email shabbat@bauk.org

Editor's Corner

Shalom!

As many *chaverim* start a new school year this week, we wish you all *bhatzlachah!*

Bnei Akiva has also kicked off, with a very enjoyable *Bogrim's* event around central London on Thursday evening. Thank you to the *Nivcharim* who organised it!

The *Mazkirut* have returned from the UJIA “Chazon” training seminar for movement workers, full of inspiration and ideas for the coming year. We are very excited to start working with our brilliant *Nivcharim*: Darryl Bernstein, Joe Boxer, Zechariah Creeger, Deborah Lubinsky, Talya Mullah and Katie Shemtob.

Shabbat Shalom

THIS WEEK'S SHABBAT TIMES

	🕒	🌙
London	19:08	20:07
Manchester	19:14	20:23
Birmingham	19:12	20:19
Leeds	19:12	20:21
Liverpool	19:17	20:26
Jerusalem	18:13	19:34

To receive Shabbat Lashem by email every Friday, or for sponsorship details, send an email to shabbat@bauk.org



Mystery Melacha

Harry Salter

Harry Salter is in Shevet Eitan and was a Madrich on Bet Base Machane 5774

There are 39 activities that Jews are not allowed to do on Shabbat. These are called “Melachot” or “Acts of work”. Can you guess which Melacha this riddle is about? Log onto the Bnei Akiva Youtube channel after Shabbat to see if you're right!

I stare at the biscuit in the Kiddush hall

And I feel myself beginning to drool

But I'm about to leave the shul!

As I leave I notice a cake

But yet again, I will not take

Because it goes against Halacha

Now tell me... Which Melacha?

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Insight and Inspiration on the Parasha

Rav Ari Faust, Rabbinical Shaliach

I Know, I'm Amazing!

One of the top causes cited for low self-esteem is a person's belief system. A religious belief system which constantly puts them in a position of feeling as if they are perpetually sinning can evoke shame, guilt, conflict and self-loathing. Bearing that in mind, it is crucial that we put into perspective the phenomenon of *viduy*, when we confess over fifty sins, spanning twenty-four categories (corresponding to the letters of the *aleph-bet*) over the High-Holidays which are rapidly approaching.

The introspection is part-and-parcel of the uplifting days of the Jewish New Year, when we set the tone for ourselves to be ascribed to the book of life. The self-criticism can be both elevating and character-building, yet it can also be discouraging and even detrimental to our servitude of Hashem, which must be performed out of happiness (see Tanya chapter 1, 26). Thus, there is certainly a right way and a wrong way to approach the *viduy* and introspection of the High Holidays.

Regarding this, Rabbi Kook comments (Eyn Aya vol. 4 page 315):

"It is not good for a person that his self-criticism drives him from inner-calm and happiness. Therefore the Torah has taught us that a person must rejoice – sometimes even express orally – in all the good that he has done ... and thus, just as there is benefit in the refinement of the soul to confess the sins, there is also benefit in confessing the mitzvot."

The Torah does not want us to see ourselves in a state of perpetual-sin. There is indeed great value in addressing our shortcomings, but there is equal value in acknowledging our greatness.

In our *parasha*, we read the passage known as *viduy ma'asrot* – the confession of the tithes. Confession can never be a good thing, especially in a religious context, but the text recited for this *viduy* is in fact quite revolutionary (Devarim 26:13-14):

"I have not transgressed any of Your commandments, neither have I forgotten them ... I have hearkened to the voice of Hashem, my God, I have done according to all that You have commanded me."

There are two levels of understanding this confession: First, besides for admitting his shortcomings, the person is obligated to confess his successes and accomplishments. More than a person must see his negative characteristics, he must emphasize the positive within himself. After asserting his greatness, he can confidently address his weaknesses and seek to improve. A person must give himself a fair and balanced report – he has both good and evil, and the acknowledgement of good gives encouragement to overcome the evil.

This insight is true, but doesn't fully satisfy the wording of the passage. When reciting the *viduy* a person says that they have not transgressed any of Hashem's commandments; that he has done all Hashem has commanded. Is this possible? Can this be true? How can someone be sure that he has fulfilled his obligation flawlessly? Thus the more essential understanding of this confession is to the entirety of the person: True, says the person when reciting *viduy ma'asrot*, I have made mistakes and I have sinned; I may not be perfect. My actions may at times be bad. but in essence I am totally committed to You, Hashem, in essence I am totally good.

We cannot address the shortcomings the same way we address the good. The shortcomings are particular actions the person has committed, while the good is the person's totality – his essence. A person may not be beyond critique, but this cannot strip them of their essence, which is good.

With this understanding, even the confession of sin becomes an expression of greatness. As the person acknowledges the iniquity he has transgressed, he expresses his understanding of this wrongdoing, and his acknowledgement that it is so unbecoming of his essence; he could do better because he truly is better.

As we approach the days of confession and forgiveness, we must acknowledge our goodness – no, our greatness – and with the certainty in the goodness of our essence, address our shortcomings with the confidence that the upcoming year will be one that reflects our true, essential selves – full of virtue, righteousness and goodness.

• Rav Ari Faust is in Shevet Yechiam, and is Shaliach for Bnei Akiva and the Jewish Agency for Israel

Elul Inspiration: Rebuke and Redemption

Shulamit Lew

In this week's Parsha, the Jewish people are warned of what will happen to them if they stray from Hashem's commandments. We read a similar caution just before Shavuot in Parshat Bechukotai. As we approach Rosh Hashana, we read these warnings again. On Shavuot, Bnei Yisrael accept the Torah so the *tochachot* are read then to remind us of what will happen if we don't follow the Torah which we have accepted. On Rosh Hashana, we are judged for the previous years' actions, so we read the *Tochachot* as a wake-up call to do Teshuva.

The first *tochacha* in Parshat Bechukotai is fierce and awesome, yet ends with words of encouragement and comfort, that even when Bnei Yisrael are in Galut, Hashem will not reject His people, and redemption will come. However, the *tochacha* in this week's parsha is almost double the length of the first *tochacha* and notably more harsh. But the biggest difference is the lack of a positive conclusion. Do we infer from this that there is no hope for redemption?

Rav Yosef Dov Soloveitchik looks forward to next week's parsha, Nitzavim to find the comfort.

"And it will be when all these things come upon you... and you will return to the L-rd your G-d... and the L-rd your G-d will return your captives and have mercy on you, and will gather you from all the nations."
(Devarim 30:1-3)

Why do these words of comfort not simply follow the *tochacha* itself? The Rav explains this based on an insight of the Ramban. The first *tochacha* read in parshat Bechukotai alludes to the destruction of the first Temple and the resulting galut, which lasted 70 years. The second *tochacha* in parshat Ki Tavo alludes to the destruction of the second Temple and the subsequent galut, in which we remain today. The galut of the second Temple did not come with a time limit, explaining why the comfort to the *tochacha* is found so much later. Our redemption from this galut will not just come easily, however it will come eventually. In fact, the comfort given in next week's parsha gives us the key to our own geulah.

"You will return to the L-rd your G-d... and He will gather you from all the nations."

When we repent and return to Hashem, Hashem will have mercy on us and gather us from our dispersion.

It is now obvious why we read this particular *tochacha* in the run up to the high holy days. We are reminded what immense power our teshuva has, that self-examination and returning to G-d has the power to bring about the ultimate geula for Am Yisrael.

The fact that for the first time since the destruction of the second temple, the Jewish people have sovereignty over the Land of Israel, is a clear sign that we are on our way to that geula. We must draw inspiration from this unique period in Jewish history, and be encouraged that our teshuva will continue to bring us closer to the complete geula.

Shulamit Lew is in Shevet Lehava and was a Madricha on Bet Base Machane 5774.

Coming Up...

Full details of all our events are available on our Facebook page, or call the Bayit on 0208 209 1319 to speak to one of the team.

- Selichot will be held at the London and Northern Batim. Details to follow.
- Tefillot will be taking place in the Northern Bayit on Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur. For more information, contact Mickey and Ortal at north@bauk.org. Yom Kippur services will be held in the London Bayit. Contact Marina at chinuch@bauk.org for details.
- Limmud returns to Birmingham and Manchester in the coming weeks, and to London on Monday 22nd September.
- Svivot will be kicking off around the country with Sukkah crawls over Sukkot! For details, contact your local Rosh, or Adam at svivot@bauk.org