



PARASHAS KI SAVO



Ki Savo begins with the Mitzvah of Bikkurim, the “First Fruits.” Each year, farmers in the Land of Israel bring the first of their annual crop to Jerusalem. Bikkurim can come from any of the Seven Species of produce which the Torah associates with Israel¹: wheat, barley, grapes, figs, pomegranates, olives and dates.² The farmer brings the Bikkurim to the Temple, where he publicly expresses his gratitude by recounting the Jews’ enslavement in Egypt, the miraculous Exodus, and G-d’s gift of the Holy Land. [This Biblical text forms the nucleus of the Passover Haggadah.]

The Parsha continues by describing a dramatic ceremony to be conducted after the Jews cross the Jordan River: the Israelites will stand on two adjacent mountaintops, Mount Grizim and Mount Eival. Six tribes will stand on each peak, while the Levites will remain in the valley below along with the Ark of the Covenant. Turning towards Mount Grizim, the Levites will pronounce a series of blessings for those who obey the Torah; facing Mount Eival, they will enunciate curses to befall those who perpetrate evil. Specific prohibitions listed include idolatry, denigration of parents, incest, corruption of justice, and misleading or denigrating one’s fellow man.

Moses then offers his own idyllic portrayal of the blessings earned through Mitzvah observance, followed by a graphic depiction of the disastrous consequences of sin. This latter section is known as the *Tochacha* (admonition), and is traditionally read in the synagogue in a low, hurried tone of voice.

At the end of the Parsha, Moses reflects on the Jews’ experiences over the past forty years: “You have seen all that Hashem did, before your very eyes, in the Land of Egypt – to Pharaoh, and all his servants, and all his land.... I led you through the desert for forty years; your clothing never wore out from upon you, nor did your shoes wear out from upon your feet. You ate no bread and drank no wine [but rather received food through miraculous means] – so that you should know that I am Hashem your G-d.”

Reflecting on how the People have grown to spiritual maturity, Moses declares: “G-d has not given you a heart to know, nor eyes to see nor ears to hear until this day. Keep the words of this Covenant and fulfill them, so that you succeed in all that you do.”

¹ Devarim 8:8

² These produce also have special significance in terms of the blessings one makes before eating them.