

Ki Tavoh – Shabbat 05 September 2015

Our Sedra begins with the following mitzvah: When you come to the land of Israel and after you have conquered and divided the territories, then the farmer should go down into the fields and witnessing the ripening of the Bikkurim, the first fruits, the seven distinctive fruits with which Israel is blessed, he would tie a cord around them and declare “This is Bikkurim.” Later, our farmer would take them to the Temple in Jerusalem, and he would present the basket of fruits to the Cohen with great joy and fanfare. The farmer would then make a declaration in Hebrew in which he would describe a potted history of the Jewish people. He would affirm that we came to Egypt few in number, we became a nation, and then the Egyptians enslaved us and G-d brought us out of Egypt to this land flowing with milk and honey, and here are the first fruits that G-d has given me.

So, what’s the point of this exercise?

The truth is that our farmer has put a lot of back breaking work into the land. He has ploughed, tilled and planted the seeds. He looked after his land and now it’s coming to harvest time. He witnesses the new fruits. He could become blinded by his success. He thinks to himself that I put all this work into this land and that it was “my energy and the work of my hands that has brought me this success”.

The truth is that in the first instance you could say he is right, after all he has put the work into it and created the possibility to have the bumper crop. However, the Torah says that before everything else our farmer has to realise that his success is due only from Hashem. Yes- he has to do what he has to do, but ultimately it is G-d who sustains and gives us everything in life and it is to Him that we are eternally grateful. This is the meaning of the Bikkurim. We show, before anything else that what we have comes ultimately from G-d.

During this month of Elul we read after Maariv and Shacharit Psalm 27 which speaks about how everything we have comes from God. He is my light and my salvation. Ultimately before the forthcoming High Holydays we recognise that ultimately it is Hashem to whom we need to turn. A vital message as we stand on the cusp of the New Year.