

The mitzvah of taking Bikurim (first fruits) is the focus of the first eleven pesukim of Parshas Ki Savo.

The Sifri states that the performance of this mitzvah guarantees the entry of the Bnei Yisroel to Eretz Yisroel. This enigmatic statement requires an explanation since this mitzvah cannot in fact be performed until they enter Eretz Yisroel! The Malbim explains that the very fact they agreed to perform this mitzvah on entry, was enough to earn them this precious reward.

However, there seems to be no logical connection between the two as perhaps one would expect. Why does the performance of this particular mitzvah justify this specific reward?

R' Meir Shapiro of Lublin suggests the following idea. The mitzvah of bikurim is in fact an atonement for the sin of the meraglim. It was that sad episode in our history that revealed a singular lack of trust in Hashem. This is highlighted by the language employed when sending the spies. The spies were instructed to find out - 'Are the inhabitants strong or weak', 'Are they few or many', 'Are the cities fortified or not' (Bamidbor 13:18-19). As if any of these points would make a difference to Hashem! After all, had He not promised us the land? Where was their belief and trust?

Conversely, Bikurim suggests the opposite way of thinking. The farmer acknowledges that all his produce only grows because He wills it to be so. As a result the first fruits that ripen are deemed to be holy – dedicated to Hashem. In addition, the farmer acknowledges the all encompassing power of Hashem when he declares that 'I have come to the land that Hashem promised our forefathers to give to us.' (Devorim 26:3). This is the only reason we took possession of Eretz Yisroel. It is all about faith and trust in Hashem.

Thus, through the mitzvah of Bikurim we consign the cause of the sin of the meraglim – and its consequence of not be allowed into Eretz Yisroel – to the dustbin of history. We have atoned and can now enter the land.

In a brilliant insight, R' Shapiro draws support for this idea from a Mishna in Bikurim (3:1). There the Mishna describes the exact procedure to be followed by the farmer in designating his first fruits. '...he goes down to his field and sees the first fig, cluster of grapes or pomegranate....'. Why does the Mishna specifically choose these three fruits to illustrate the Bikurim procedure?

Perhaps it is to remind us that these three fruits were the ones that the spies brought back with them from their mission (Bamidbor 13:23) and thus were to some extent 'active participants' in that sin. Since Bikurim atones for the sin of the meraglim these three fruits were specially chosen as examples of how to take Bikurim.

On a tangential point, R' Shapiro explains why there will be a Moshiach Ben Yosef, and a Moshiach Ben Dovid. Yehoshua was the prince of the tribe of Efrayim (Yosef) whilst Colev was the prince of the tribe of Yehudah (Dovid). They were the only two spies untainted by the sin of the meraglim and the subsequent four decade delay in entering Eretz Yisroel. Hence it is only correct that the two Moshiachs that will herald our return to Eretz Yisroel should come from those two tribes that had nothing to do with that earlier sin and delay in entering the land.