

SIDRA OF THE WEEK : כי תבא

1. The first part of this Sidra completes the review of the laws of the Torah by Moshe our Teacher. Most of the 613 Mitzvos of the Torah have been reviewed, some at greater length, some very concisely. (But one particular Mitzvah which, as we were just preparing to come into the Promised Land, one would have expected *should* have been spoken of, was deliberately not included in the review at all — see **SIDRA OF THE WEEK : ביהר סיני**.) The two Mitzvos that complete this whole review are the Mitzvah of *Bikkurim* (the Bringing of the First Fruits) and the Mitzvah of *Maaser Shayni* (the Second Tithe). In a way, these two Mitzvos can be said to serve as the veritable summing-up of all the Mitzvos of the Torah. For they each teach how the Jewish Nation is to remain true to its mission as the People of G-d and that is by acknowledging how everything is from Him and that we are dedicated to serve Him with our heart and being as well as with our material substance. (After this review, there are two other Mitzvos of the 613 which Moshe is still to teach us but they are more about the teaching of the Torah itself and the passing on of the Torah to future generations. See **SIDRA OF THE WEEK : וילך**.)

2. *If there is one character trait that is of supreme importance in ensuring that we shall always be loyal members of G-d's Nation, it is the character trait of gratitude. The child who has been trained to be truly grateful and who has acquired this noble quality of gratefulness cannot but be a thankful and loyal child; as an adult he cannot be anything but an appreciative and faithful member of the Jewish People and a trusty servant of HaShem. The Mitzvah of the First Fruits includes the declaration of gratitude to HaShem for His special care of us and for having brought us to our Land with all its blessings. (This declaration is a condensed history of the beginnings of the Jewish People and in fact is recited as part of the Hagaddah at the Pessach Seder Night, the commemoration of our being chosen by HaShem to be His People.) By teaching this Mitzvah as a finale in the review of all the Mitzvos, the Torah intimates that gratitude to HaShem encapsulates all the Mitzvos and the whole being of the loyal Jew.*

3. Although the Mitzvah of *Bikkurim* is incumbent upon the individual grower, in practice it assumes almost a national character. The Mishnah describes how in times past all the growers of a given region would assemble in the provincial capital, staying overnight in the open places of that town without entering any of the houses (so as to avoid any possibility of *Tum'oh*). At daybreak, the leader of the group called out, "Arise! Let us go up to the House of our G-d!" ... The procession was led by a fife band and a steer, crowned with a wreath of olive leaves and its horns gilded, for a *Korban Shelommim*, until they reached the outskirts of Yerushalaim. When they arrived there, they would send into the City one of their group to announce their arrival, while the

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rest would in the meantime prepare and adorn their baskets of *Bikkurim* fruits. The high officials of the Beis HaMikdash, their deputies and assistants and the administrators of the Treasury would go out to meet them and receive them, the number of these depending upon the size of the party arriving. All the artisans of Yerushalaim would stop work to greet the pilgrims saying, “Our brothers from such-and-such a region, peace be upon you!” The music continued to lead the procession until they reached the Temple Mount. Once they arrived at the Temple Mount, everyone — even the king himself, if he was part of this group — took his own basket upon his shoulder and entered the Great Courtyard of the Temple. Then the Levi'im called out in song ...

4. The next Mitzvah, *Maaser Shayni*, stands in some contrast to the Mitzvah of *Bikkurim*. If *Bikkurim* is a national event, *Maaser Shayni* is more a family experience. In HaShem's plan for His People, the Kohen and Levi are the moral guides and Torah teachers, the Rabbis, of the Jewish People. (“Rabbi” means “teacher.”) (See also **SIDRA OF THE WEEK : א.א.מ.ר.**) As such, HaShem wishes them to be freed from the usual worries of earning their livelihood from the Land and for this reason they are not given a portion in the Land. Instead, they are supported from the *Terumoh* and *Maaser* and the various other *מִתְּנוּת כְּהוֹנֵה* that we are commanded to give them, as follows: Each year of the six-year agricultural cycle of years, commands the Torah, we are to give *Terumoh* to the Kohen. (Generally, this would be about a sixtieth of the harvest, but the more generous gave more.) In addition, we are commanded to give to the Levi, the Kohen's assistant, one tenth of the remaining produce. This is called *מִעֲשֵׂר ראשון*, the First Tithe and it is given to the Levi in each of the six years, as *Terumoh* is given to the Kohen. In the first, second, fourth and fifth years of the six-year cycle, we are commanded to separate a second tithe (called “*מִעֲשֵׂר שֵׁנִי*”) from the remaining produce — but this is for the grower himself, with his family, to take up to Yerushalaim, to eat there. In the third and sixth years of the cycle, this second tithe was replaced by the tithe for the poor (called “*מִעֲשֵׂר עֲנִי*”) instead. The seventh year, of course, is the Shmittoh Year, when the Land rests “a Shabbos to HaShem” and there is no *Terumoh* or *Maaser*. In a case where the farmer cannot go up to Yerushalaim, the Torah allows a person to redeem his *Maaser Shayni* and set aside the money so that he can take it up to Yerushalaim at a more convenient time and there spend it on food and drink. The Torah here commands that this must be before the end of the third year.
5. While it can be said that the Mitzvah of *Bikkurim* helps to foster — and indeed is a demonstration of — the gratitude of the Jewish People serving HaShem, the Mitzvah of *Maaser Shayni* is quite clearly a practical means through which the Jewish People actually become the people of the Torah. Taking all the rules and regulations of *Maaser Shayni* together, this intended purpose of this Mitzvah and its effect upon the Jewish family and the Jewish People as a whole become quite clear. As follows: the Torah stipulates that the *Maaser Shayni* produce must be eaten only in Yerushalaim or, in the case of *Maaser Shayni* money, this money can be spent only on food and drink and can be enjoyed only in the Holy City of Yerushalaim. But Yerushalaim is holy not so much because of the Beis HaMikdash there. It is holy because of the Torah that is taught

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there by the Nation's Torah sages who together constitute the Sanhedrin, the highest Court in the Land (which is in fact situated in the Beis HaMikdash complex). The Torah personalities and leaders who make up the Sanhedrin (and their deputies and understudies) when they are not actually engaged in Sanhedrin duties, are, of course, mainly occupied in teaching Torah in the Yeshivos and Torah Academies. These Yeshivos and Torah Academies, comprising altogether hundreds and thousands of Torah students, for practical reasons have to be situated in the vicinity of the Sanhedrin. Yerushalaim thus becomes the Torah city of the Nation and it is in this city that the Torah commands the homesteader to use up his *Maaser Shayni*. Since he cannot use the *Maaser Shayni* money on anything other than food and drink, he is forced to spend time in Yerushalaim and can "soak up" the atmosphere of Torah, as it were, in this supreme Torah City. And so it comes about that every man, from all over the country, from the far north to the deep south and from east to west, comes into close contact with the world of Torah and through actual Torah study has the opportunity of regular spiritual renewal, together with his family and friends. This Mitzvah ensures that not only is there no such thing as an exclusive class of Torah scholars, aloof from the rest of the people, but to the contrary, every man in the Jewish People is included in Torah and Torah study. *This* is how the Jewish People is to function in the Holy Land as the blessed People of HaShem.

6. Having thus completed his review of the Mitzvos of the Torah, Moshe our Teacher tells us that by accepting to be the conscientious guardian of the Torah we acknowledge that HaShem is our G-d, to obey only Him. In return, HaShem proclaims us as His Chosen People, entrusted with the task of making known His G-dliness and Sovereignty amongst the Nations of the World.
7. Continuing this theme, in his next speech, Moshe our Teacher, with the Elders at his side as the People's representatives, commands the People concerning the actual procedure of taking possession of the Promised Land. He tells us that immediately upon entering the Land we are to make clear for all the world to know and understand that we are the People of HaShem whose purpose is to bring the whole of Mankind to acknowledge HaShem as the Sovereign of all the World, that each nation and folk shall live under His benign Sovereignty in justice and peace. To this purpose, Moshe instructs us that on the very day that we cross the River Yardayn into Eretz Yisroel, we are to set up twelve great steles, each with six faces, and upon these seventy-odd faces we are to write the essence of the entire Torah, translated into the seventy main languages of the day and clearly explained. In this way, all those who want to, can understand the Jewish People and what they represent and teach. Everyone who comes to see this extraordinary "People of G-d" will be directed to the site of these great stones, to read and understand, each in their own language, of G-d the Father and Ruler of Mankind, that He alone is to be worshipped as G-d (at that site is also to be a *Mizbayach* dedicated to HaShem) and of the ideals of justice and peace that He wishes His human subjects to live by and uphold. This, says Moshe, is the mission of the Jewish People and it is this, our mission to all Mankind, that makes us into the People of HaShem.

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8. But after they will have crossed into the Promised Land the Jewish People are bound to undergo a transformation. No longer will they be together in such a close-knit camp as they were in the Wilderness. Tribes and families and indeed individuals will make their own way in the new country. Even as they know that they are part of the Jewish Nation, in their isolation they might forget their mission and their duty as part of the Chosen People. Therefore, says Moshe our Teacher, HaShem commands that just as we are about to take possession of the Land as individual families, in addition to the clear declaration by the Jewish Nation of our mission to the world, there is to be a demonstration and declaration by all the people who make up the Tribes of Israel that they shall each, individually and even living in isolation, remember their duties to uphold the Torah. Even out of sight and living in solitude, every Jew is in duty bound to do the Mitzvos of HaShem and keep away from all that He has forbidden. At this great demonstration at Mount Gerizzim and Mount Ayyol, to take place just as soon as we enter the Land, the Jewish people are to declare their unity of purpose and their responsibility for each other and the procedure for this grand ceremony is given in this week's Sidra. (See also **SIDRA OF THE WEEK: כִּי תבֹּא**.)
9. Moshe our Teacher again tells us of the great blessing and goodness that we will enjoy as HaShem's People when we diligently observe all the Mitzvos of HaShem, how all the Nations of the World will recognize us as G-d's Nation and will respect us and seek to learn from us the Way of G-d. However, warns Moshe, if we should turn away from HaShem and His Torah, if we should not serve HaShem in joy and good heart with all the good that He bestows upon us, then terrible indeed will be the punishment that HaShem will bring upon His People to make them return to Him. Unfortunately, in our more-than-three-thousand-year history, every single one of the wide-ranging list of terrible calamities and catastrophes that we are warned will follow if we should defect from HaShem and His Torah and which are foretold in this long chapter — each one of them, in their different places and in different times — have all come true. Indeed, however unbelievably shocking and far-fetched they seemed to be, their fulfilment is proof positive of the truth of the Torah. But these punishments are not meant to destroy us, they are meant to bring us back to HaShem. Therefore, as soon as we return to HaShem and repent of our errant ways, HaShem will be happy to take us back again. For He will never forsake us for any other people and He will never abandon us.
10. Finally, Moshe points out how our own eyes had seen the fearsome and wondrous punishments that HaShem had brought upon the Egyptians for their defying His command to them to let us go free and how, during our forty years in the Wilderness, we had been educated and trained to know the power of HaShem and had experienced His Providence. Therefore, says Moshe, we must take care not to falter but to be strong in our resolve to fulfil our destiny as the People of HaShem in the Holy Land, an example to all of Mankind.

For the explanation of the Haftarah of Sidra כִּי תבֹּא please go to HAFTORAHS.