

Hametz and Matza on Pesach, Shavuot, and in the Bread Offerings¹

Hametz and matza often appear in the Torah in juxtaposition, with one highlighted in contrast to the other. Sometimes hametz is forbidden while one is obligated to eat matza. At other times it is hametz that is mandatory and that represents the essence of God's command. In between, there are instances where hametz and matza are both involved, and one is obligated to have the one as well as the other.

Any explanation for the essential significance of hametz and matza must take into consideration *all* of the contexts of their respective appearances and all of the prohibitions and commandments involving them. An analysis of the various sources that appear in the Torah, along with an understanding of the symbolism of hametz as opposed to matza, shows that the instances referred to above are not independent, discrete laws, but rather the details of a complete, unified system.

To uncover this system, let us first examine the contexts within which hametz and matza occur in the Torah:

- a. The Pesach sacrifice: hametz is prohibited with a negative command, while there is a positive command to eat matza. The context of the prohibition concerns the Pesach sacrifice on the 14th of Nissan (and perhaps the following days).
- b. The festival of matzot: hametz is prohibited and punishable by 'karet', while matza is permissible. Here, the context of the prohibition for all future generations is anchored in the matza baked during the Exodus from Egypt: "And they baked the dough which they had brought out of Egypt into cakes of matza, for it had not leavened, for they had been expelled from Egypt and could not tarry..." (Shemot 12:39).
- c. The two loaves offered on the festival of bikkurim: this sacrifice of a bikkurim meal offering is unquestionably connected to the omer of barley prescribed for the "month of spring", and indirectly also to the Pesach and the festival of matzot, since it is dependent on the counting of fifty days "from the day after the festival (lit. "Shabbat") (Vayikra 23:15-16), or "from when the sickle first meets the corn" (Devarim 16:9). According to Hazal, this refers to the day after the "shabbaton" – the first day of the festival of matzot. In contrast to the Pesach and the festival of matzot, however, here it is specifically the hametz that is obligatory: "From your dwelling places you shall bring two loaves for waving, of two tenth measures. They shall be of fine flour; they shall be baked with leaven, as first fruits (bikkurim) to God." (Vayikra 23:17)
- d. Minha (the meal offering): all meal offerings sacrificed on the altar are matza and not hametz: "No meal offering that you sacrifice to God shall be [made with] hametz, for you shall not burn any leaven, nor any honey, in an offering to God made by fire. As to the

¹ My thanks to Yossi Elitzur, who helped consolidate this article.

offering of the first fruits (bikkurim) – you shall offer them to God, but they shall not be burned on the altar for a sweet savor” (Vayikra 2:11-12).

e. Offering of thanksgiving: Here we have both; hametz together with matza: “If he offers it for thanksgiving then he shall offer with the sacrifice of thanksgiving loaves of matzot mixed with oil, and matzot wafers anointed with oil, and loaves of fine flour, mixed with oil, well soaked. Together with loaves of bread that is hametz shall he offer his sacrifice, along with his peace offering of thanksgiving” (Vayikra 7:12-13). In other words, he offers three types of matzot along with one type of hametz.

f. “Consecration offering”: Like the offering of thanksgiving, there are three types of matza involved: “Bread of matzot and loaves of matzot mixed with oil and wafers of matzot anointed with oil, of fine wheat flour...” (Shemot 29:2, also Vayikra 8:26). Indeed, the Mishna (Menahot 7,2) draws a parallel between them: “The ‘consecration offerings’ resembles the matza in the thanksgiving offering – loaves, wafers, and soaking”. In contrast to the thanksgiving offering, there is no hametz here at all.

g. The ram offered by the nazir: “On the day that his nazirite vow is fulfilled”, the nazir brings a burnt offering, a sin offering, and a peace offering. Along with the peace offering he brings “a basket of matzot, loaves of fine flour mixed with oil, and wafers of matzot anointed with oil” (Bamidbar 6:15) – i.e., two types of matzot. As the Mishna explains (Menahot 7,2), “the nazirite status brings two portions, like the matza in the offering of thanksgiving: loaves and wafers, with no soaking.”

h. Meal offering of inauguration: This meal offering was brought by every kohen on the day of his inauguration into the service of the Sanctuary, or by the Kohen Gadol upon assuming this position. Like the “consecration offering”, the inaugural offering also involves only matza, with no hametz (Vayikra 6:12-16).

i. Prohibition of hametz upon the altar: “... No meal offering that you bring to God shall be made with hametz, for you shall burn no leaven, nor any honey, in any offering to God made by fire. As to the offering of the first fruits (bikkurim) – you shall offer them to God, but they shall not be burned on the altar for a sweet savor” (Vayikra 2:11-12). Therefore, even the offering of the two loaves on the day of the first fruits (detailed above), which specifically stipulates that the loaves should be hametz, comes **up until** the altar and is waved **before God**, but is not actually offered **upon** the altar. The same applies to the first fruits of the honey – i.e., the honey of the sweet fruits.

How are we to understand all of these different instructions? We need to understand the nature of hametz and of matza, in light of each of these various situations, and uncover the essential idea that serves as their common axis.

Leaven, hametz and also honey (the honey of the sweet fruits) represent the final goal to which the farmer aspires, from the start of his work. Both bread which is hametz and the ripe, sweet fruits express the end of the successful process, the longed-for end-result. They therefore also symbolize the wealth and success, the abundant Divine blessing of a

person who has seen the realization of that which he had visualized at the start, and which he pursued until he achieved it.

Matza, in contrast, represents a station in mid-process, before the end-result is achieved. It represents a deficiency that is waiting for completion.

(Salt, the other element which must accompany every meal offering, expresses a raw, primal substance untouched by human hands; it is entirely a gift from God.)

We may expand this idea somewhat and propose that matza – both practically and as a symbol – is “poor man’s bread”: it is the bread of someone who lacks the ability and resources to bring the material process to its completion in the form of a full, leavened loaf. Hametz – the leavening that allows the dough to rise and form a rounded cake - is the symbol of the wealthy person of means and power.

This understanding of the symbolism of hametz and of matza is the key to understanding all of the various contexts in which they occur in the Torah as a single, integrated system.

“For you shall not burn any leaven, nor any honey...”

The offering that a person brings upon the altar is, like prayer, an expression of man standing before God, filled with a sense of his own lowliness and insignificance, and with a sense of “Yours, O Lord, is the greatness and the might and the splendor and the eternity and the glory... for who am I, and who is my nation, that we should enjoy such generosity, for everything is from You, and it is from Your hand that we have given to You” (Divrei ha-Yamim I 29:10-15). A person cannot stand before the altar with a proud sense of wealth that says, “I have”, “I own” – or, “My strength and the might of my hand have achieved all of this valor” (Devarim 8:17). A sacrifice offered with such a feeling would be an act of impudence, of pride and arrogance – one of the most serious transgressions in the realm of the relations between man and God.

For this reason, “You shall not burn any leaven, nor any honey” – the symbols of wealth and the sense of satiety – “in an offering to God made by fire” (Vayikra 2:11-12). Admittedly, “the offering of the first fruits (bikkurim) – you shall offer them to God” (ibid.), and these “from the first of all fruits of the land” (Devarim 26:2) are brought to the Temple with a ceremonial declaration whose purpose is precisely to prevent the sense of fullness and abundance from leading to dismissive rejection – “And Yeshurun grew fat and he kicked” (Devarim 32:15). Even then, however, they are not offered like “the prayer of a poor man when he is faint, who pours out his case before God” (Tehillim 102:1). Therefore, they may not be offered upon the altar: “but they shall not be burned on the altar for a sweet savor” (Vayikra 2:11-12).

Symbolically, success - and the feeling of “I have” that goes along with it – resemble a ripe, sweet fruit, as well as hametz, in that both are delicate and spoil easily. It is specifically a rich person, used to luxury, the “the delicate, spoiled one among you whose foot has never touched the ground, so spoiled and delicate is she” (Devarim 28:54-56) – this person in particular is so used to fine living that any small hardship causes him great

anguish and represents a difficult challenge. On the other hand, a person who is used to suffering, who has weathered many difficulties, is not easily frightened by hardship. In the same way, matza – the bread of the poor man, like salt – has incomparably more endurance and staying power than puffy bread that is hametz, or sweet, ripe fruit.

It is no coincidence that our sources identify leaven with the evil inclination (*yetzer ha-ra*). A person who is blessed with an abundance of physical health, material assets and even Torah-learning may fall into false sense of might and independence and forget God, “Who gives you the strength to perform valor” (Devarim 8:17-18). This is precisely the aspect of the *yetzer ha-ra* that tempts a person specifically in Eretz Yisrael, and may lead him off the proper path (Devarim 8, and the song of Ha’azinu).

Therefore a person is obligated to remember his humble beginnings; his servitude, his wandering in the wilderness, and the manna of the Exodus – **specifically at the hour of his great prosperity in Eretz Yisrael:**

“You shall remember all of the way that the Lord your God has led you for these forty years in the wilderness, in order to afflict you and test you, to know what is in your heart –whether you will observe His commandment or not. And He afflicted you and made you hungry, and He fed you manna which you had not known, and which your forefathers had not known, in order to make it known to you that man does not live by bread alone, but man lives by all that emerges from God’s mouth.”

This is also the significance of the recitation over the bikkurim, reminding the bearer of the time of Bnei Yisrael’s affliction and wandering during the time of the forefathers, specifically at the time of celebrating his successful and abundant harvest and the bringing of the first fruits.

Sacrifice of Thanksgiving:

An offering of thanksgiving is brought by a person who faced some danger or predicament and was delivered from it. Therefore, when he is saved, it is indeed proper that his offering include both hametz loaves and matzot. The matzot symbolize the trouble that he was in, the bitter cry that he uttered, and the process of redemption from that predicament to an open space of relief. The hametz represents the completion of his deliverance and his current state of tranquility; it is an expression of reaching the end of this particular road; the attainment of peace and satisfaction.

There is an interesting parallel between this offering, with its diverse elements, and chapter 107 of Tehillim, which presents four instances of redemption from trouble. On the halakhic level, we deduce from these verses the details of the “four who are obligated to give thanks” (Berakhot 54b; Shulhan Arukh, Orah Hayim, 219:1), but on the simplest and most literal level, the psalm in its entirety is talking about the ingathering of the exiles:

“Let the redeemed of God say this, whom He has redeemed from the hand of the enemy, and gathered them from the lands – from the east and from the west, from the north and from the south”.

The psalm goes on to describe four models of redemption, each comprising a four-stage progression:

- i. The trouble and suffering
- ii. Crying out to God
- iii. Deliverance
- iv. Thanksgiving

The first deliverance described in this psalm refers to leaving the desolation of the wilderness: “They wandered in the wilderness on a desolate road” (verse 4) – this is the situation of suffering. Then, “They cried out to God in their distress” (verse 5), following which there comes deliverance: “He delivered them out of their suffering. And He led them by a straight path, that they might reach a city of habitation” (verses 6-7). Finally, **“Let them praise God for His kindness and for His wonders to the children of men. For He has satisfied the longing soul, and has filled the hungry soul with goodness”** (8-9).

The same four stages are followed in the second instance, describing “those who dwelled in darkness and the shadow of death, bound in affliction and iron”, and again in the third case - the “foolish who were afflicted by their sinful way”, who “approach the gates of death” (verses 18-22). The fourth case concerns “those who go down to the sea in ships; performing their labor in great waters”, whose ship is tossed about in the stormy waves. These four cases are really two: the first and the last describe those who have willingly started out on the path of the ingathering of the exiles, through wilderness and wild seas. The second and third are the sinners who do not wish to be gathered in, and who end up at the very gates of death in the form of illnesses and prisons:

”For they have rebelled against the words of God, and rejected the counsel of the Supreme One” (verse 11).

The “counsel of the Supreme One”, in this psalm, refers back to the opening verses: it refers to the ingathering of the exiles in Eretz Yisrael.

Perhaps the three matzot of the thanksgiving offering should be viewed as paralleling, to a considerable degree (through allusion) the three stages that precede the thanksgiving: the stages of distress, crying out, and deliverance (which in itself is a difficult process, characterized by gradual development and restlessness). Along with the matzot, this offering also includes the loaf of hametz, corresponding to the fourth stage – the singing of thanks to the Master of the world Who redeems and saves, for having brought this person to his state of tranquility.²

² The continuation of psalm 107 is equally worthy of attention. It describes two difficult problems faced by those who have been redeemed, after they have already reached Eretz Yisrael. If we look at these verses from a prophetic perspective, it is astonishing to note the extent to which these specific problems have indeed come about in our times (and it must be remembered that never in history was there an ingathering from all four corners of the world – as indicated in verse 2 – until the great campaigns and airlifts of the State of Israel).

The first problem is, “He turns rivers into a wilderness, and watersprings into dry ground; a fruitful land into barrenness...” (verses 33-34) - the early pioneers found a barren, desolate land. Immediately thereafter, there is a description of the abundant blossoming of the land after the return: “He turned the wilderness into a pool of water, and dry ground into watersprings. And He causes the hungry to dwell there, and they establish a city for habitation, and they sow fields and plant vineyards, which yield the fruit of their produce. (30-31). This miraculous revival happened in our times.

Secondly, there is a sharp demographic decline, coupled with a crisis of leadership: “They were diminished and brought low by oppression and affliction and sorrow; He pours contempt upon nobles, causing them to

Consecration offering and meal offering of inauguration:

This sacrifice is offered by the kohanim as they commence their service. This auspicious occasion signifies the start of a period that continues for as long as the kohen serves in his capacity, with no end point or conclusion; it is from now onwards, forever. Therefore it is appropriate that the offering include only matza; there is no room for hametz.

The Mishna in Menahot (7,2) draws a parallel between the consecration offering and the offering of thanksgiving:

““The consecration offering resembles the matza in the thanksgiving offering – loaves, wafers, and soaking.”

On the basis of the literal meaning of the verses (and not in accord with the Mishna), it may be that a distinction – in content and significance – should be drawn between the “loaves of fine flour, mixed with oil, well soaked” (Vayikra 7:12) that form part of the thanksgiving offering, and the “loaf of matza mixed with oil” and the “one loaf of oiled bread” (Shemot 29:2,23 and Vayikra 8:26) that comprise the meal offering of consecration. The fact that the Mishna points out their parallel does not yet constitute proof of our thesis, but it does show that the Mishna approaches the subject in the way that we have presented it above: through a comparison of the various sorts of meal offerings in the Torah.

Sacrifice of the nazir:

An examination of the nazir’s sacrifice in accordance with the principle set forth above, serves to present the nazirite status in its true light. The period of nazirite abstention is not an end in itself; rather, it is a period of preparation with a view to a more elevated and perfected life afterwards. The entire experience is orientated towards the future:

“Thereafter the nazir may drink wine” (Bemidbar 6:20)

In other words, the nazir returns to normalcy – but on a higher level, with an improved system of spiritual protection against deviation and attraction to wine. He is now able to drink wine in a state of moral purity.

For this reason, “on the day that his period of separation is fulfilled”, the nazir offers only matzot, without hametz. The conclusion of his nazirite abstention is not in itself an objective or achievement; rather, it is the beginning of a more perfected and noble way of life. His great mission of living a better life actually begins only when the nazirite abstention ends. There is no justification for an indulgent celebration with loaves of hametz when his vow ends. Rather, he behaves like a kohen who is entering his service: he offers two of the matzot that are included in the consecration offering.

This explains the matter of a nazir who is referred to by the Torah as a “sinner” (“And [the kohen] shall make atonement for him, for his having sinned by the dead” – Bemidbar 6:12). The essence of the “sin” involved here is the subject of debate among the Tannaim. To the view of Rabbi Elazar ha-Kappar, the sin of the nazir lies in his having withheld

wander in oblivion, where there is no way” (39-40). However, there is a promise that the nation will emerge from this position of weakness: “He lifts the destitute from affliction and makes families like a flock. The righteous will see it and they will rejoice, and all iniquity will shut her mouth” (41-42).

wine from himself. Rabbi Yishmael, on the other hand, maintains that the procedure in question applies to a nazir who became ritually impure through contact with a dead body. The literal reading of the verses unquestionably supports the view of Rabbi Yishmael: the nazir was not sufficiently careful in observing the prohibition against contracting ritual impurity (which applies even in the event of one of his close relatives passing away). The context makes this clear: (verse 9): “And if a person dies by him suddenly, such that he defiles his head of consecration...” (alluding to the nazir’s long hair, owing to the prohibition against cutting it). The “sin by the dead” is the fact that the nazir has defiled himself through contact with a corpse.

The view of Rabbi Elazar ha-Kappap seems very far-fetched in relation to the literal text. However, in light of the discussion above it must be granted that the idea behind his interpretation makes perfect sense: the nazir has “sinned” if his vow of abstention has not found favor and has not brought him to the spiritual level that he had sought to attain. Therefore “the preceding days are lost, for his separation was defiled”; he must begin his period of abstention anew. Since nazirite separation is not a worthy goal in its own right, one who abstains from wine is called a “sinner”. Had there been any value to the actual state of separation, in and of itself (as maintained, for example, by Christian doctrine), then we could say, “At least this person spent some time abstaining from wine; he still managed to do something positive.” However, the Torah views this abstention as nothing more than a means to a more pure, whole life; therefore, the fact that the nazir became defiled should be regarded as a heavenly sign that his path and his efforts to attain special sanctity have not been received with favor. The abstention from wine, in this case, has not truly led to the elevated, desired purpose, such that the abstention itself is rendered a sin. Therefore the nazir is said to have “sinned” specifically when some of the specified period of his abstention is disqualified because of his defilement. (The approach of Rabbi Elazar ha-Kappap provides support for this interpretation.)

As an aside it should be noted that despite the similarity between the offering of the nazir who is at the beginning of his path and the offering of the kohen at his consecration, the Torah does draw a distinction between them. The kohen’s offering during the days of consecration includes three types of matzot, while the nazir brings only two types; his offering lacks the matza that is “soaked”. The source of this discrepancy may lie in the fact that the kohanim effect a fundamentally positive change in their status; they assume a special status amongst the nation of Israel. Therefore, it is proper that they bring an offering of matza that is well soaked in oil; it is a “rich” offering. The nazir, on the other hand, does not experience a change in status as a result of his period of abstention; rather, he returns to regular life and his regular status, although he should have elevated himself in terms of spiritual purity. Admittedly, there is considerable similarity between the nazir *during* his period of abstention and the Kohen Gadol, concerning whom the Torah states: “...nor shall he approach any dead body; he shall not defile himself for his father or his mother. He shall not leave the Sanctuary, nor profane the Sanctuary of his God, for the crown of the anointing oil of his God is upon him; I am God” (Vayikra 21:11-12). (Concerning the nazir, the Torah says, “the crown of his God is upon his head” – Bemidbar 6:7).

Nevertheless, after the period of abstention is over, he retains no special status.

The matza of the Pesach offering, and the festival of matzot:

In light of what we have said thus far, we may go on to demonstrate that the matza and hametz that characterize Pesach and Shavu'ot, respectively, belong to the same system of distinction. The ideas represented by the hametz and matza – the bread of wealth and the bread of affliction – are not mere moral theorizing; rather, they represent a consistent, systematic contrast that is interwoven throughout their appearances in the Torah. The expanded version of the command concerning the Pesach sacrifice reads as follows: “You shall eat no hametz with it (the Pesach sacrifice); for seven days you shall eat matzot with it – the bread of affliction – for you came forth from the land of Egypt in haste...” (Devarim 16:3).

It is “the bread of affliction” not only because of the haste with which it was baked, but also because those who left Egypt were indeed like oppressed refugees, setting out on a long journey through the wilderness. And since matza is “the bread of affliction”, it is clear that hametz must represent the bread of wealth.

On Pesach eve, Bnei Yisrael were still in Egypt. Until the middle of the night they were still considered Paro's slaves. Under such conditions there is no room – either at that time or on Pesach eve for all later generations – for hametz. The Pesach sacrifice is eaten with bitter herbs and with matza: “This is the bread of affliction that our forefathers ate in the land of Egypt.” At midnight, God struck all the firstborn of the land of Egypt, and redeemed His nation from their imprisonment. Generations of spiritual and physical subjugation were brought to a sudden end with the long-awaited fulfillment of the promised redemption. Seemingly, the nation should now have been able to lounge about like free people, setting a festive banquet table and singing praise and thanks in a relaxed atmosphere, with rich, oily bread. But it suddenly becomes clear just how far the redemption is from being complete:

“And the Egyptians pressed upon the people, that they might send them out of the land in haste... and the people took their dough before it was leavened – their kneading troughs bound up in their clothes upon their shoulders” (Shemot 12:33-34).

The people embark on a long, arduous journey “in the great and terrible wilderness of snakes and scorpions and thirst, where there is no water” (Devarim 8:15). Before they have even a moment to relax and enjoy their freedom, filling their lungs with the clear air of freedom, they are already gasping with exertion in their hasty flight to a land of dry desolation.

Apparently, redemption is a prolonged, difficult process requiring patience and a great capacity for discomfort. Even then, the ability to achieve the desired level of prosperity and comfort is not in their hands. “Hametz” is far removed from them; it lies beyond the horizon. When Bnei Yisrael leave Egypt, all that they have is their matza – the bread of affliction:

“They baked unleavened cakes from the dough which they had brought out of Egypt, for it was not leavened. For they had been driven from Egypt, and could not tarry; not had they prepared themselves provisions.” (Shemot 12:39)

Their ongoing sustenance as exiled refugees continues to be provided not by their own efforts, but rather as a kindness from Above:

“They asked and He brought quails, and He satisfied them with bread from the heavens. He opened the rock and water gushed forth; it ran in dry places like a river.” (Tehillim 105:40-41)

For this reason, hametz must be strictly forbidden for all generations specifically on the days following the anniversary of the Exodus from Egypt. Conversely, the matza that is eaten for the seven days of the “festival of matzot” expresses the true redemption – with all of its trials and tribulations; an ongoing redemption comprising many stages.³

This also serves to clarify the differences between the Pesach sacrifice that was performed prior to the Exodus from Egypt, and the “festival of matzot”, which commemorates the Exodus itself. On Pesach, the essence of the obligation is to offer the Pesach sacrifice and to eat it with matzot and bitter herbs, as a positive commandment – in memory of the end of Egyptian subjugation, which followed immediately afterwards. The prohibition of hametz, in the context of Pesach, is only a negative commandment: “You shall not offer the blood of My sacrifice with hametz, nor shall you leave the sacrifice of the Pesach festival until morning” (Shemot 34:25).

In contrast, when it comes to the festival of matzot, the essence of the obligation is to avoid any hametz – to the extent that “it shall neither be seen nor be found”. The eating of matza during the seven days is not obligatory at all; it is optional. A person who eats hametz during the festival of matzot is punishable with ‘karet’, while on the day of the Pesach festival this punishment is meted out to someone who fails to offer the Pesach sacrifice. This is a special instance where ‘karet’ is incurred through omission of a positive commandment – as in the case of circumcision. The essence of the festival of matzot, then, is a severe warning against the illusion of a complete redemption that happens in a single moment – as though the hametz of Shavu’ot was within reach, immediately after the Pesach. The expectation of “instant hametz” (i.e., that things should immediately become easier, more comfortable, perfect), which is quite understandable and natural to a redeemed nation, explains the severity of the prohibition and the fences that distance us from it, as formulated in the Torah and in halakhic literature throughout the generations.

This winding path that starts with a denigration of subjugation, and the exodus from it, ultimately leading to the hoped-for peace and tranquility of Eretz Yisrael at the end of the journey, finds expression in the counting of fifty days from the beginning of the harvest (Devarim 16:9), from the day when the “omer of the wave offering” is brought, until the festival of the harvest – which is the day of the first fruits, on the day following the end of

³ A person who does not thank God for the beginning of the redemption – even though it does not yet include either Torah or Shabbat, neither the land of Israel nor a Temple – is like someone who did not recite Hallel over the Exodus, and did not offer a Pesach sacrifice. On the other hand, one who views the beginning of the redemption as though it already represents the complete redemption, is effectively like one who eats hametz during the festival of matzot.

the seventh week. The conclusion of this counting is marked with the loaves of bikkurim, also representing the conclusion and ultimate purpose of the Exodus from Egypt.

Two loaves – hametz:

The day of the bikkurim itself represents, as noted, the conclusion of the process; the attainment of its actual and metaphoric fruits. This conclusion is expressed on two levels. The first, a veiled allusion, leads from the Exodus from Egypt to the Revelation at Sinai and the giving of the Torah. The second, open and explicit, expresses permanent habitation in Eretz Yisrael. Both levels come together and connect with the day of bikkurim.

The entry into the land and the permanent habitation in it are mentioned explicitly on this day:

“When you come to the land which I am giving you, and you reap its harvest, then you shall bring an omer of the firstfruits of your harvest to the kohen... and you shall count for yourselves from the day after the Shbbat, from the day that you brought the omer of the wave offering... until the day after the seventh Shabbat you shall count fifty days, and you shall offer a new meal offering to God. From your habitations you shall bring two wave loaves of two tenth measures; they shall be of fine flour, they shall be baked as hametz, they are firstfruits to God.” (Vayikra 23:9-17)

The festival of Shavu’ot (i.e., the festival of [counting] weeks), which is also the harvest festival and the festival of bikkurim (first fruits), is therefore an agricultural celebration in all of these senses. It is the beginning of the first fruits of the wheat harvest – specifically in the sanctified Land of Israel⁴, and it is the day of bringing the two loaves of hametz “from your dwelling places” on the fiftieth day – the climax of the process of the beginning of the harvest, which began with the omer offering.

The first aspect – the conclusion of the process that began with the Exodus from Egypt, and which reached its climax at the giving of the Torah – is likewise connected, albeit indirectly, with the date of the day of bikkurim. While the connection is not explicitly indicated in the text in the same way as the agricultural festival that is bound up with the land, it nevertheless arises from the structure of the text⁵ and from the broad parallel

⁴ Mishna Kelim 1:6-9 – “There are ten levels of sanctity: the Land of Israel is sanctified to a greater degree than all other lands. What is its sanctity? That from it the **omer and the bikkurim and the two loaves** are brought, whereas these are not brought from the (produce of) other lands”. (Compare also with Bemidbar Rabba 7.)

⁵ The fact that the command to leave the gleanings of the field for those who are less fortunate (Vayikra 23:22) follows immediately after the details of the meal offering for Shavu’ot and the “proclamation on this very same day” (verse 21) serves to include a commemoration of the Exodus from Egypt – remembering the destitute and the strangers in the midst of our celebration – as a very central element in this festival of agricultural thanksgiving, with its first fruits of the harvest (hametz!). This is not a theme that is integral to the agricultural festival, for it does not flow directly from the abundant blessing that God has bestowed upon the land, but rather from our historical memories as a nation that emerged from Egypt landless and with no produce. While many people associate Torah first and foremost with the thunder and lightning at Sinai, or with the prohibitions of Shabbat and idolatry, the Torah and the prophets define true Divine service as concern for the weaker members of society (see Yishayahu 1:58; Amos 8, etc.) In Devarim 16:9-12 the connection between such concern and the fact that we were slaves in Egypt is spelled out. Thus, if

between the giving of the Torah and the giving of the land. We shall elaborate on this point because of its fundamental importance, arising from Hazal's identification of Shavu'ot with the time of the giving of the Torah.

- a. The time when Bnei Yisrael gathered in order to receive the Torah seems clear in the text:

“In the third month from Bnei Yisrael's exodus from Egypt, on that day they came to the wilderness of Sinai... and Israel encamped there before the mountain.” (Shemot 19:1-2)

In other words, this took place on Rosh Hodesh of the third month (Sivan) of the first year of the Exodus. (In most places in Tanakh, “hodesh” or “ha-hodesh” refers to Rosh Hodesh.) Even the most pedantic scholar of the literal school, insisting that the actual date in the third month is missing, would still have to admit that the giving of the Torah clearly took place close to the fiftieth day (which is the festival of Shavu'ot and the day of bikkurim), but the commemoration of the date for future generations is based on the fifty-day count alone.

An exact parallel to this is to be found in the original plan for the desired arrival of Bnei Yisrael in Kadesh Barne'a, the southern gateway to Eretz Kena'an, in anticipation of the conquest. The original plan for the journey seems to have been aimed at the same date as the arrival on site for the giving of the Torah, one year later – in other words, Rosh Hodesh Sivan in the second year:

“And it was, in the second year, in the second month, on the twentieth of the month, that the cloud was lifted from above the Sanctuary of Testimony. And Bnei Yisrael journeyed from the wilderness of Sinai... and they made their first journey, at God's word by the hand of Moshe.” (Bemidbar 10:11-13)

Later on, the Torah sums up this journey with the following explicit definition:

“It is eleven day's journey from Horev, via the mountain of Se'ir, to Kadesh Barne'a.” (Devarim 1:2)

Taken together, these two sources indicate that Bnei Yisrael were supposed to reach Kadesh Barne'a, the gateway to Eretz Kena'an, on Rosh Hodesh Sivan in the second year – exactly a year after arriving at Mount Sinai. Furthermore, these two journeys are presented as a direct continuation of Pesach. In the case of the giving of the Torah, the connection is manifest; after all, Bnei Yisrael as well as the Egyptians had been told in advance that the objective of the journey was to serve God in the wilderness on their way from Egypt⁶ :

“This shall be the sign for you that I have sent you: when you take the people from Egypt, you shall serve God upon this mountain” (Shemot 3:12).

the weaker members of society are not awarded a special place on Shavu'ot then we have not properly fulfilled the obligation imposed by the Exodus from Egypt.

⁶ See Shemot 3:18; 5:3; 7:26; 8:16; 9:1; 9:13; 10:3, 7-11, 24-26

Therefore, the statement of this objective is not a mere excuse meant to convince Paro, but rather a genuine original intention,⁷ as evidenced by this verse and, of course, by the eventual Revelation and giving of the Torah at that place. Like the Exodus from Egypt, the journey to Eretz Kena'an, in the second month of the second year, comes as a continuation of the Pesach commemorated in the wilderness, which included "Pesach Sheni"⁸ on the fourteenth day of the second month (Iyar) (Bemidbar 9:1-14). It is also interesting that in each case Yitro appears in the narrative, in this period between Pesach and Shavu'ot (Shemot 18:1-27; Bemidbar 10:29-33). In general there is room for a comparison between these two periods, based on the commentaries and beyond them.

b. The description of God's giving of the land, like His giving of the Torah, appears not in the Torah itself, but only in Sefer Yehoshua, owing to the fact that the original plan was rendered void by the complainers, the desirers of meat, and the spies. These various trouble-makers led Moshe to despair and also caused a delay of approximately a month in the original plan (Bemidbar 11:19-20), such that Bnei Yisrael arrived at Kadesh Barne'a not at the time of the wheat harvest, as intended, but rather during the "time of the first of the grapes" (Bemidbar 13:20). Thus it was, at the peak of summer, in their exhausted and weakened state, that God's decree became a weeping for all generations.⁹

Admittedly, in Sefer Devarim the covenant of the plains of Moav is presented as a parallel to the covenant of Horev (chapters 4-5, and in contrast, 27-28), but the occasion that most reminds us of the gathering at Sinai is recorded in Sefer Yehoshua, in the conquest of Yeriho. The beginning of this process in Yehoshua likewise parallels the Exodus from Egypt: the parting of the Yarden unquestionably parallels the spilling of the Reed Sea – in terms of the nature of the event, its description, and its psychological effect on "all the kings of the Emori who were on the other side of the Yarden, to the west, and all the kings of the Kena'ani who were by the sea... and

⁷ Hence, the Exodus from Egypt has two simultaneous and equally valid purposes: a. Worshipping God at Mount Sinai; b. returning to the land of the forefathers and conquering it, thereby realizing God's promise to the forefather. It is out of weakness that the "haredim" (ultra-Orthodox) among us recognize only the first as the essence of the Torah, while the "Zionists" among us acknowledge the importance of only the second purpose.

⁸ The Pesach in Egypt introduced the Exodus; the Pesach in the wilderness introduced the journey from Horev through the wilderness. This is hinted to in the fact that one who journeys "on a long way" is included among those who celebrate Pesach Sheni. It is for this reason that the parsha of the Pesach in the wilderness, in the first month and in the second month, for those who are ritually impure (or on a long journey), must conceptually precede the journey on the twentieth of the second month. Likewise at the next stage, the Pesach commemorated in Gilgal introduces the conquest of the land.

⁹ Physical and spiritual fatigue go hand in hand here. With the desert sun burning overhead, the people want to remain at the oasis of Kadesh Barne'a. The initiative to send spies may be interpreted as an attempt to "buy time", to postpone the journey. The punishment – "measure for measure" – is that the people misses the most opportune time for a speedy, surprise campaign of conquest, and a wait in the wilderness for an entire generation. In any event, by the month of Av it is already too late to go up and conquer the land, and the decree had already been passed. This, it seems, is what motivated Hazal in their formulation of the fundamental connection between mourning and the months of Tamuz and Av: "... The Holy One, blessed be He, said: You wept for nothing; I will establish a weeping for all generations" (Ta'anit 29a, and Yerushalmi, ad loc.)

their hearts melted, and they had no more spirit in them, because of Bnei Yisrael” (Yehoshua 5:1). Indeed, the parallel is given explicit expression in Tehillim 114: “The (Reed) sea saw it and fled; the Yarden was turned back”, with the general introduction for both events, “When Israel came out of Egypt”.

The circumcision at Giv’at ha-Aralot in Gilgal is likewise an integral part of the exodus from the wilderness, which is somewhat like a renewed Exodus from Egypt, being defined as the point of severance from Egypt and all that it symbolized: “And God said to Yehoshua: This day I have rolled the reproach of Egypt from upon you” (Yehoshua 5:9).

“For all the people who left (Egypt) had been circumcised, while all those who were born in the wilderness, on the way from leaving Egypt, had not been circumcised” (5:5).

This parallel between the exodus from the wilderness with the entry into the land, on one hand, and the Exodus from Egypt, on the other, holds the key to the meaning of the “reproach of Egypt” referred to in the verse cited above, which has posed such difficulties for commentators and scholars alike.¹⁰ It also hints to the circumcision that preceded the Exodus from Egypt, which had been referred to in the text only in an indirect fashion.¹¹

¹⁰ See Rashi, Radak and Ralbag on Yehoshua 5:9; Rashi on verses 2,4; Rashi on Bemidbar 9:1; and Yevamot 71b-72a, and Tosfot ad loc. The difficulty centers around the phrase, “the reproach of Egypt”. If those who left Egypt were circumcised while those who were born after the Exodus were not, then it would be more logical for the verse to say, “the reproach of the wilderness”. One possible conclusion is that the Egyptians themselves actually practiced circumcision, and they scorned Bnei Yisrael for failing to observe their covenant in this regard – based on their understanding of the covenant of circumcision as fundamentally bound up with Eretz Yisrael, which is where Avraham was commanded, while they themselves were slaves in a foreign land. Thus, the “reproach” – the foreskin – was removed from them for the first time when they performed a mass circumcision prior to leaving Egypt, in preparation for the Pesach, and then for a **second** time (Yehoshua 5:2) at the second mass circumcision in preparation for the conquest of the land – thereby emerging completely from both slavery and their status as “arelim”; the “reproach of Egypt” was removed from them and they once again merited the land of their inheritance. According to this explanation, the “reproach of Egypt” includes the reproach of the uncircumcised status, and at the same time - the reproach of exile and slavery. A parallel between the Pesach of Egypt and the Pesach of Gilgal, then, may be the key to understanding both parshiot, since the circumcision mentioned in Yehoshua 31 had also appeared in Shemot 12, but there it was included indirectly among the laws of the Pesach sacrifice (verses 43-49): “... No uncircumcised person shall eat of it.”

¹¹ The story of Tzipora’s circumcision of her son is puzzling in many respects. Briefly, I believe that the explanation that makes the most sense is proposed by Y. Blau (Tarbitz 26 [5717, pp. 1-3]), who maintains that this was a sign to Moshe, like the other signs that he had received from God, to show Moshe the manner of the deliverance of Bnei Yisrael. God gives Moshe a message to convey to Paro, “So says God – Israel is My firstborn son. And I say to you, Let My son go, that he may serve Me. And if you refuse to let him go, behold – I will slay your firstborn son.” Immediately thereafter, we read, “And it was, on the way, at the lodge, that [an angel of] God met him, and sought to kill him [Moshe’s firstborn – see Targum Yerushalmi]. Without analyzing each stage of this narrative, it is clear that it should be read in its context, with the blood of the Pesach offering in Egypt and the circumcision performed by Yehoshua in Gilgal and the Pesach in Gilgal, as a comprehensive synchronic reading – just as the midrashic sages always understood it. The midrashim hint (on Shemot 4:24-26) that if Bnei Yisrael would neglect the commandment of circumcision – even for such justified and urgent reasons as being busy with their redemption, or at a “lodge” on their way to redemption, such that circumcision would be postponed even for a short time, their lives would be at risk owing to the destroying angel that would be slaying the firstborn of the Egyptians.

The Pesach observed by Bnei Yisrael on the plains of Yeriho on the fourteenth of the first month – the “Pesach of Gilgal”, which precedes the conquest of Yeriho upon entry into the land – is not only chronologically earlier, but is also fundamentally a necessary precondition. There is a Pesach sacrifice in anticipation of the Exodus from Egypt, and there is a Pesach sacrifice in anticipation of the conquest of the land.

The conclusion that arises from the above analysis is that the Exodus from Egypt represents the point of departure for a dual process. Its goal is on one hand the giving of the Torah, and on the other hand - the giving of the land, which is the clearly stated objective of the Exodus in the majority of the sources (see, for example, Vayikra 25:38). Since the giving of the land did not end up happening during the lifetime of the generation that left Egypt, the renewed effort to reach the land in the time of Yehoshua starts off with the splitting of the Yarden, a mass circumcision, and the Pesach in Gilgal – a replay of sorts of the Exodus from Egypt.

This parallel between the giving of the Torah and the giving of the land is clearly borne out in the climax of the description in Sefer Yehoshua:

- a. Mount Horev (Sinai) and Yeriho are both defined as “holy places”, where an angel of God appears to the prophet, God’s emissary. In the case of Moshe, this happens at the burning bush, at the mountain of God at Horev: “An angel of God appeared to him in a flame of fire from the midst of the bush... and he said: Do not draw close to here; remove your shoes from your feet, for the place where you upon which you stand is holy ground” (Shemot 3:1-5). In the case of Yehoshua, this happens at Yeriho: “And it was, when Yehoshua was at Yeriho, that he lifted his eyes and he saw, and behold – a man stood facing him, with a sword drawn in his hand... and he said... I am the captain of the host of God; I have now come... Remove your shoe from your foot, for the place upon which you stand is holy” (Yehoshua 5:13-15).
- b. In the description of God’s appearance before Bnei Yisrael, before the giving of the Torah, we read, “... and there was thunder and lightning, and heavy cloud upon the mountain, and the sound of the shofar exceedingly loud, and all the people in the camp trembled” (Shemot 19:16). This shofar blast announces God’s revelation; His one-time appearance in history to make His word heard and to give the Torah to His people, Israel.

So long as the Divine Presence remains upon the mountain, no-one is permitted to approach it (other than Moshe, who alone is permitted to draw near “to the thick darkness where God was” – Shemot 20:18). Bnei Yisrael are commanded: “Guard yourselves not to go up into the mountain, nor to touch its outermost edge; anyone who touches the mountain shall surely be put to death. No hand shall touch him, but he shall surely be stoned or shot through; whether it is an animal or a man – it shall not live. When the blast sounds long, then they shall come up to the mountain” (Shemot 19:12-13).

The long blast (“yovel”) announces the appearance of the Divine Presence and its disappearance; thereafter, “they shall come up to the mountain”. The text refers here

not only to a physical ascent, but also a spiritual ascent: the actualization of all that is embodied in that occasion and in the Ten Commandments that were given there, representing the nucleus of the entire Torah.¹²

A brief look at Sefer Yehoshua shows that a similar, parallel event took place at Yeriho, but here the context was the conquest and the giving of the land to Bnei Yisrael. Everything that happens after Yeriho, in the various battles of conquest, should be regarded as the actualization of the original, fixed event at Yeriho, with the appearance of God's Presence there.

Corresponding to the shofar that announces the revelation at Sinai, and the long blast that marks its conclusion, we find in Yehoshua:

“You shall go around the city, all the men of war, going about the city once; so shall you do for six days... and on the seventh day you shall go around the city seven times, and the kohanim shall sound the shofarot. And it shall be, when the horn's blast sounds long, when you hear the sound of the shofar, all the people shall shout a great shout, and the wall of the city will fall down, and the people shall go up – each person straight ahead” (Yehoshua 6:3-5).

The content and style of these verses clearly parallel the auditory experience at Sinai, including the aspect of the six days and then a seventh day:

“God's glory rested upon Mount Sinai, and the cloud covered it for six days, and He called to Moshe on the seventh day out of the midst of the cloud” (Shemot 24:16). It is also interesting to note that according to the prevailing view in the midrashim, both occasions – the Revelation at Sinai and the gathering at Yeriho – took place on Shabbat.¹³

The intrinsic reason for this parallel lies in the fact that at Yeriho, as at Sinai, there was a revelation and descent of the Divine Presence; an occasion that is all about God's judgment – of Israel, on one hand, and of Eretz Kena'an and its inhabitants, on the other, since the “sin of the Emori” is already complete.¹⁴ The “Ark of God, Master of all the earth” (Yehoshua 3:13) which goes around the city, and the sounding of the “shofarot of ram's horns before the Ark of God” (6:13) are themselves a proclamation that “the Supreme God is terrible; a great King over all the earth... God sits upon the throne of His holiness”¹⁵, and that this represents “a judgment of the God of Yaakov”¹⁶. Therefore, at that moment, “it is holy ground”! This may shed light on a possible interpretation of the description of the city: “Yeriho was tightly shut up before Bnei Yisrael; none emerging and none entering” (Yehoshua 6:1).

¹² According to Rav Sa'adia Gaon; we see this clearly in the groups of mitzvot in the Torah, see Shemot 20-23 (34), also Vayikra 19 and the adjacent chapters, and Devarim 5-7, 11-26).

¹³ This is the opinion of Rabbi Yossi in the Gemara (Ta'anit 28b; Yoma 4b; Shabbat 86b). The Yerushalmi asserts that “Yehoshua's conquest of Yeriho took place on Shabbat”.

¹⁴ See Bereishit 15:16.

¹⁵ Tehillim 47:3,10

¹⁶ Ibid. 81:5

The inaccessibility is not only a technical problem arising from the barred gates. Bnei Yisrael may not enter because a place where the Divine Presence appears is out of bounds to them, just as Moshe is commanded to set bounds around the mountain and sanctify it, “lest they [Bnei Yisrael] break through to God to gaze and many of them perish” (Shemot 19:21).

The long blast of the horn, just as at Sinai, is the sign that the revelation of the Divine Presence is over; the judgment of the nations is concluded, the verdict has been passed. God has taken Eretz Kena’an from the nations that dwell there and has given it, as He sees fit, to the nation that He has chosen.¹⁷ From this point onwards, Bnei Yisrael are entitled – indeed, obligated – to ascend to the place that God has indicated to them, because God is in their midst, and therefore they will not be driven back before their enemies.¹⁸

Everything that happens afterwards to the thirty-one kings of Kena’an is the actualization of the verdict passed at Yeriho, and therefore the midrashim view all of the kings as being concentrated in Yeriho when it falls by God’s hand:

“For the Supreme God is terrible; a great King over all the earth. He subdues peoples under us, and nations beneath our feet. He chooses our inheritance for us – the pride of Yaakov whom He loves, Selah” (Tehillim 47:3-5).¹⁹

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Let us return to our original subject. We have found that the day of bikkurim, fifty days after the Pesach sacrifice, expresses the conclusion and ultimately purpose of both the Exodus from Egypt and the beginning of the omer that is harvested in the land – both in the sense of the giving of the Torah and in the sense of the giving of the land, and that these two themes are interwoven in the Torah itself, and not only in the tradition of Hazal.

Therefore, the essential uniqueness of this day lies in the commandment of the two loaves, which are specifically hametz, with no matza at all – as a sign that the ultimate purpose of the Exodus from Egypt has been achieved. It is now proper and appropriate to set a festive table, to celebrate in tranquility, in the land of our inheritance, the completion of the Exodus and the completion of the counting of the harvest, and to bring

¹⁷ The well-known Rashi from the beginning of Bereishit, based on Yirmiyahu 27:5, directs us to read the entire account of the Creation as background to God’s decision to award Eretz Yisrael to Bnei Yisrael. The lesson that Rashi is teaching is not “faith in Eretz Yisrael”, as some believe, but rather faith in God, Creator of the world, Who takes lands from certain nations and gives to certain others **by His will**, and Who gives Eretz Yisrael to Am Yisrael **with the intention of them being worthy of it**.

¹⁸ Cf. Bemidbar 14:40-45, but the inverse.

¹⁹ It is for this reason that Hazal view Yeriho as the key to the conquest of the land: “When [Yehoshua] came to wage war against Yeriho, [all] seven peoples entered Yeriho, as it is written: ‘You passed over the Yarden and you came to Yeriho, and the and the men of Yeriho fought against you – the Emori, the Perizi, the Hitti and the Kena’ani and the Gargashi, the Hivvi and the Yevusi, and I delivered them into your hand’. Did all seven peoples then live in Yeriho? Rabbi Shemuel bar Nahmani said: Yeriho is the axle of Eretz Yisrael. If Yeriho is conquered, the whole country falls. Therefore the seven peoples gathered themselves into it” (Bemidbar Rabba, 15,15; Tanhuma Be-ha’alotekha, 18; Yalkut Shimoni Yehoshua 32).

a wave meal-offering of hametz, first fruits to God, as a special communal sacrifice, from the land on the west side of the Yarden²⁰.

Bikkurim of the individual

To the above we must add a few words concerning the bikkurim brought by the individual, which is permissible from this day onwards²¹, and the special recitation that accompanies them:

“And it shall be, when you come to the land which the Lord your God gives to you and an inheritance, and you take possession of it and dwell in it, that you will take from the first of all the fruit of the land which you will bring of your land... and you shall come to the kohen who will be in those days, and you shall say to him: I declare this day to the Lord your God that I have come to the land which God promised to our forefathers, to give to us...” (Devarim 26:1-3).

The crux of this festive declaration is the acknowledgement that this process is now concluded for the individual, too:

“And you shall speak and say before the Lord your God: My ancestor was an Aramean nomad, and he went down to Egypt... and the Egyptians treated us badly... and we cried out to the Lord God of our fathers... and God brought us out of Egypt with a strong arm... and He brought us to this place, and gave us this land – a land flowing with milk and honey. And now, behold, I have brought the first of the fruit of the land which You, God, have given me.’ And you shall set it before the Lord your God, and you shall worship before the Lord your God. And you shall rejoice in all the goodness that the Lord your God has given to you and to your household – you, and the levite, and the stranger who is in your midst” (ibid. 5-11).

There is no supplication here, in the spirit of a poor man standing at the doorway; there is no distress. There is only a festive proclamation, a declaration uttered from a position of wealth, ability, and the power of someone who “has”. The individual declares that he is fortunate – but at the same time he must recall and recount what he came from, how the whole lengthy and difficult process began, how he came to have these fields and fruits which his forefathers never had. He declares that all that he has comes from the Master of the world, Who brought his forefathers out of Egypt and Who caused the fruits to grow in his field, in the land of his inheritance – the inheritance of his forefathers.

In fact, this is a considerable and qualitative expansion of the blessings that are recited prior to eating and afterwards. We bless God “Who brings forth bread from the earth” and “for the land and for the nourishment”. Here, the declaration elaborates and gives thanks for the land which God gave us after bringing us out of Egypt as a nation, and the field and the produce which God has given to the individual who is bringing his firstfruits and making the declaration. Thus, there is an overt and explicit connection between faith in the Lord God of Israel, in the historio-national sense of the Exodus, and faith in Him in

²⁰ See Mishna Bikkurim, end of chapter 1; Yerushalmi ad loc. Concerning the debate over the inheritance of the half-tribe of Menashe in Bashan.

²¹ See Mishna Bikkurim 1,6. See also my article, “The Day of Laying the Foundations of God’s Sanctuary” (concerning the prophecies of Haggai and Zekharia), Megadim 12 (Tishrei 5751), pp. 49-97.

the cosmic, religious sense, as the One Who feeds and sustains us in the land. These two dimensions are reflected in the fundamental duality of the Hebrew calendar and of the festivals.

The dual significance of the bikkurim and of the Exodus is thus explicit in the Torah and in the recitation over the bikkurim.

The understanding of all that the bikkurim symbolize serves to highlight the contrast between the bikkurim and prayer – the “prayer of the afflicted when he is faint, and pours forth his case before God” (Tehillim 102:1); the “prayer of the destitute” (verse 18), uttered as a cry for help “on the day of trouble” (verse 3), out of anguish and helplessness.²² The sweet fruit of bikkurim and the hametz, which are never offered upon the altar²³, brings with them the declaration out of joy and contentment: “And you shall rejoice in all the goodness that the Lord your God has given to you and to your household” (Devarim 26:11).

Translated by Kaeren Fish

²² See also Tehillim 3:4-12

²³ “Any sweetness of a fruit is called ‘honey’” (Rashi on Vayikra 2:11, based on Safra, and Mehahot 57b-58a). Obviously, on the literal level, the “honey” of the vegetable kingdom means whatever sweet fruit grows in the region: figs on the mountains (Devarim 32:13), dates in the valley. Therefore the bikkurim must be waved (Menahot 61-62), but they are not offered “for a sweet savor”, or in any form, upon the altar (Menahot 58a), since the bikkurim – sweet fruit – express the pride of achievement, which stands in fundamental opposition to the “prayer of the afflicted”. Every rich person is completely destitute at his birth and at his death, and hence also in his prayer for his life and soul.