

Dvar Torah Outline — Parashat Ki Tavo: Bikkurim, “Elokecha,” and Reconnecting to the Shoresh

Abstract

Rabbi Shulman frames the mitzvah of ביכורים as the “pinnacle” of coming home to Eretz Yisrael: a spiritual return to the inner root of things. He addresses why the Torah emphasizes going specifically to “the kohen in those days” and why the declaration is phrased “לה' אלוֹקֶיךָ” (as if Hashem is the kohen's God). Drawing on רבי צדוק, Rabbi Shulman explains that the kohen represents the “kohen-dimension” within every Jew—accessing פנימיות and the shoresh—and he connects this to תפילה and as post-Temple pathways of the same root-reconnection, especially relevant as Rosh Hashanah approaches.

I. Bikkurim as the culmination of “coming home” to Eretz Yisrael

A. Opening frame: “וכי תבוא אל הארץ” → straight into ביכורים

- Rabbi Shulman: The parashah begins with arrival in the Land and immediately moves into the mitzvah of ביכורים as the culmination of returning and reconnecting to פנימיות הדברים.
- Coming with first fruits symbolizes returning to beginnings and meaning, not only enjoying the harvest.

B. The bikkurim encounter with the kohen

- The farmer comes to the kohen and declares gratitude/arrival in the Land.
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II. Two textual difficulties in the bikkurim declaration (1:00)

A. Why stress “the kohen who will be in those days”?

- The Torah says: “וּבֹאֵת אֶל הַכֹּהֵן אֲשֶׁר יִהְיֶה בַּיָּמִים הָהֵם”
(And you shall come to the kohen who will be in those days.)

- Rabbi Shulman notes:
 - By a judge (as in Shoftim), this phrase makes sense: even if he seems “lesser” than earlier generations, he is your authority now.
 - **Ramban’s question (as cited by Rabbi Shulman):** why is that message needed by a kohen? You’re just giving fruit; what “guidance” is being resisted?

B. Why does the farmer say “לה' אלוֹקִיךָ” (Hashem *your* God)?

- The declaration is framed as if addressed to the kohen’s relationship with Hashem:
 - Why not “לה' אלוֹקֵינוּ” (our God)? Is Hashem only the God of the kohen?

III. Rabbi Tzadok’s framework: “threefold Torah” and the threefold people (2:30)

A. The Gemara’s idea of “threes”

- Rabbi Shulman cites a Gemara in Shabbat: Hashem gave a **threefold Torah** to a **threefold people**.
- Rabbi Shulman: “threefold” implies something containing **three aspects within one integrated reality**, not merely three separate groups.

B. How can Israel be “threefold” if there are kohanim/levi'im/Yisraelim?

- Rabbi Shulman (in Rav Tzadok’s name): If the three were only separate categories, calling the people “threefold” wouldn’t fit.
- Instead: each Jew, as a child of **אברהם יצחק ויעקב**, contains all three dimensions.

C. The Avot as the inner roots of the three roles

- **אברהם** as a kohen-like figure (service of Hashem; received כהונה from מלכי צדק).
- **יצחק** as the dimension of **יראה**, aligned with the levitical mode.
- **יעקב** as the inclusive, encompassing קדושה of ישראל.

IV. “Go to the kohen in your days”: accessing the kohen within yourself (5:00)

A. The kohen is not merely a ritual functionary

- Rabbi Shulman: Bringing bikkurim isn't just “handing over fruit” for a ceremony.
- The avodah of bikkurim comes from **tapping into who the kohen is**—meaning, awakening the kohen-dimension inside oneself.

B. Why the Torah says “לה' אלוּקִיךְ”

- Rabbi Shulman: The farmer is effectively saying:
 - “I am coming to you (the kohen) to connect to **your unique relationship** with Hashem as a kohen, so that I can awaken that פנימיות within myself.”
- This addresses why the declaration speaks in the kohen's “second person.”

C. Why someone might resist—and why the Torah insists anyway

- A person might think: “the kohen of my generation isn't on the level of earlier kohanim.”
- The Torah's message: **go anyway**—this is the kohen “in your days,” and through him you connect to the פנימיות you seek.

V. What bikkurim is really about: recognizing beginnings and the shoshon (6:30)

A. Bikkurim as “the start of everything”

- Rabbi Shulman: The essence is recognizing the **beginning** beneath the abundance:
 - You have a huge harvest—but it all traces back to the first fruits.
- Bikkurim trains a person to reconnect to שורש הדבר rather than get lost in outcomes and quantity.

B. Returning to the story's origin: Avraham and the promise of the Land

- Rabbi Shulman: The bikkurim declaration takes us back to the beginning—specifically to אברהם אבינו, to whom Eretz Yisrael was promised.
- He references Avraham's concern that his descendants might become lost from the קדושה when they enter the Land, and Avraham's question of במה אדע.
- Rabbi Shulman notes a Midrash that includes **bikkurim** as part of the “answer”/vehicle to preserve that קדושה.

VI. After bikkurim's loss: תפילה and ברכות as ongoing “bikkurim-consciousness” (7:30)

A. Moshe's enactment of תפילה when bikkurim would be absent

- Rabbi Shulman: The Midrash says Moshe saw bikkurim would become batal, and he established תפילה.
- תפילה functions similarly: recognizing where everything comes from and reattaching to the source

B. The Ha'amek Davar: ברכות הנהנין rooted in the ביטול of bikkurim

- Rabbi Shulman cites the העמק דבר:
 - When bikkurim existed, bringing bikkurim from a species would “cover” that fruit for the year—your eating would automatically recall the source and gratitude.
 - Without bikkurim, we need a **new ברכה each time** we eat to recreate that reconnection to the shoresh.
 - Rabbi Shulman's emphasis: this is a powerful reframing of brachot as a constant re-rooting practice.
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VII. Closing: Elul/Rosh Hashanah readiness through “inner bikkurim” (9:01)

- Rabbi Shulman: Today, without a Beit HaMikdash, there remains an **internal avodah of bikkurim**—tapping into פנימיות and מקור החיים.
 - As Rosh Hashanah approaches, the call is to reconnect to the **source of our existence** : “אין לך ביכורים גדולה מזו.”
 - Concluding brachah: We should merit preparing ourselves to reconnect to the shoresh in these days.
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In Summary

- Rabbi Shulman presents bikkurim as the spiritual climax of entering the Land: returning to פנימיות and the shoresh.
- “The kohen in those days” matters because the kohen is a conduit to awaken the kohen-dimension within every Jew, regardless of generational comparisons.

- highlights approaching the kohen's unique relationship with Hashem in order to "לה' אלוֹקֶיךָ" cultivate one's own.
- function as post-Temple continuations of bikkurim's core work: repeatedly ברכות הנהנין and תפילה reconnecting everyday life to its Source, especially in preparation for Rosh Hashanah.