



בית העם

שיג ושיח ציוני

Shavu'ot From 'People of the Land' to 'People of the Book' and back

Deuteronomy 26

1 And it shall be, when thou art come in unto the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee for an inheritance, and dost possess it, and dwell therein; 2 that thou shalt take of the first of all the fruit of the ground, which thou shalt bring in from thy land that the Lord thy God giveth thee; and thou shalt put it in a basket and shalt go unto the place which the Lord thy God shall choose to cause His name to dwell there. 3 And thou shalt come unto the priest that shall be in those days, and say unto him: 'I profess this day unto the Lord thy God, that I am come unto the land which the Lord swore unto our fathers to give us.' 4 And the priest shall take the basket out of thy hand, and set it down before the altar of the Lord thy God. 5 And thou shalt speak and say before the Lord thy God: 'A wandering Aramean was my father, and he went down into Egypt, and sojourned there, few in number; and he became there a nation, great, mighty, and populous. 6 And the Egyptians dealt ill with us, and afflicted us, and laid upon us hard bondage. 7 And we cried unto the Lord, the God of our fathers, and the Lord heard our voice, and saw our affliction, and our toil, and our oppression. 8 And the Lord brought us forth out of Egypt with a mighty hand, and with an outstretched arm, and with great terribleness, and with signs, and with wonders. 9 And He hath brought us into this place, and hath given us this land, a land flowing with milk and honey. 10 And now, behold, I have brought the first of the fruit of the land, which Thou, O Lord, hast given me.' And thou shalt set it down before the Lord thy God, and worship before the Lord thy God. 11 And thou shalt rejoice in all the good which the Lord thy God hath given unto thee, and unto thy house, thou, and the Levite, and the stranger that is in the midst of thee.

1. According to the bible, what does Shavu'ot celebrate?
2. Who is the text addressed to? What is their life style?
3. Why is the difficult past of our nation mentioned at a time of such joy?
4. Please share a "First Fruits" (Bikkurim) experience from your life - an achievement after a lot of hard work.



Mishna, Tractate Bikkurim

HOW WERE THE BIKKURIM SET ASIDE? A MAN GOES DOWN INTO HIS FIELD, HE SEES A FIG THAT RIPENED OR A CLUSTER OF GRAPES THAT RIPENED, OR A POMEGRANATE THAT RIPENED, HE TIES A REED-ROPE AROUND IT AND SAYS: LET THESE BE BIKKURIM ...

HOW WERE THE BIKKURIM TAKEN UP TO JERUSALEM? ALL THE INHABITANTS OF THE CITIES THAT CONSTITUTED THE MA'AMAD ASSEMBLED IN THE CITY OF THE MA'AMAD, AND SPENT THE NIGHT IN THE OPEN PLACE THEREOF WITHOUT ENTERING ANY OF THE HOUSES. EARLY IN THE MORNING THE OFFICER SAID: 'LET US ARISE AND GO UP TO ZION, INTO THE HOUSE OF THE LORD OUR GOD'.

THOSE WHO LIVED NEAR BROUGHT FRESH FIGS AND GRAPES, BUT THOSE FROM A DISTANCE BROUGHT DRIED FIGS AND RAISINS. AN OX WITH HORNS BEDECKED WITH GOLD AND WITH AN OLIVE-CROWN ON ITS HEAD LED THE WAY. THE FLUTE WAS PLAYED BEFORE THEM UNTIL THEY WERE NIGH TO JERUSALEM; AND WHEN THEY ARRIVED CLOSE TO JERUSALEM THEY SENT MESSENGERS IN ADVANCE, AND ORNAMENTALLY ARRAYED THEIR BIKKURIM.... ALL THE SKILLED ARTISANS OF JERUSALEM WOULD STAND UP BEFORE THEM AND GREET THEM: "BRETHREN, MEN OF SUCH AND SUCH A PLACE, WE ARE DELIGHTED TO WELCOME YOU".

THE FLUTE WAS PLAYING BEFORE THEM TILL THEY REACHED THE TEMPLE MOUNT; AT THE APPROACH TO THE COURT, THE LEVITES WOULD SING THE SONG: "I WILL EXTOL THEE, O LORD, FOR THOU HAST RAISED ME UP, AND HAST NOT SUFFERED MINE ENEMIES TO REJOICE OVER ME".

THE RICH BROUGHT THEIR BIKKURIM IN BASKETS OVERLAID WITH SILVER OR GOLD, WHILST THE POOR USED WICKER-BASKETS OF PEELED WILLOW-BRANCHES, AND THEY USED TO GIVE BOTH THE BASKETS AND THE BIKKURIM TO THE PRIEST.

1. Do you find the Biblical Shavu'ot and the Mishnaic one similar? In what way? How do they differ?
2. Why do the communities gather at night and go up to Jerusalem together?
3. What do you think about the distinction that's being made between the rich and the poor?
4. To what modern ceremony could we compare the Bikkurim (First Fruits) ceremony?



After the exile from the land of Israel, when the Jews no longer had their own land, the Shavu'ot holiday changed dramatically:

Babylonian Talmud, Tractate Yoma

"...We have been taught: On the sixth day of the month was the Torah given to Israel.

"...We have a teaching in accord with Resh Lakish': Moses went up in a cloud, was covered by the cloud, and was sanctified by the cloud in order that he might receive the Torah for Israel in sanctity; as it is written (Genesis 24): "And the glory of the Lord abode upon Mount Sinai".

"It is written in the Zohar that the first righteous would stay awake all night and study Torah. And most of the students used to do so. And this can be explained simply: Because the Israelites were asleep all night, and God needed to wake them... that's why we should amend". (Magen Avraham)

1. What does Shavu'ot of the Talmud and the Zohar celebrate?
2. Why did the Jews become 'people of the book' in the Diaspora?
3. What is the origin of the custom of staying up all night at Shavuot and studying Torah?
4. Which element or value in your life would you celebrate with such passion?



1. Why was renewing the First Fruits celebration so important to the pioneers of the first Aliyot (waves of immigration to Israel)?
2. In what does the pioneer's ceremony resemble or differ from the biblical and mishnaic ceremony?
3. The Bikkurim celebrations still take place every year in some Kibbutzim and Moshavim in Israel. What would you celebrate / bring to the ceremony if you celebrated it with your community or family?

When the pioneers of the first Aliyot arrived to Palestine

They chose to go back to the biblical-agricultural Shavu'ot holiday and renew the First Fruits celebrations. The festive ceremonies included beautiful shows with dancing and singing, accompanied with a parade of decorated agricultural tools and more. The fruits that were brought were dedicated to the Jewish National Fund (JNF). The pioneers celebrated the achievements of the working settlements:

Our Baskets on our Shoulders

Lyrics: Levin Kipnis

Meody: Yedidya Admon

Our heads in wreaths
From the ends of the country we came,
brought the first fruits.

From the village, from Kibbutz and from Moshav
From the Valley, from the Negev, from the Galilee!
Make free a way for us,
First fruits are with us,
Beat, beat, beat the drum,
Play the flute.

Our fields and our gardens have ripened harvests
Our vineyards, our vegetable beds have produced
wonderful first fruits
Figs, oranges and apples,
Grapes, pomegranates and almonds.

Make free a way for us...

Bikkurim celebrations in Izra'el Valley (1923)

"On Sunday there was a parade from the Harod Spring all the way to Tivon Village: first marched a calf and a foal decorated with ribbons. Then all the calves marched, carrying the first fruits, accompanied by riders. Members of Ein Harod, Geva and Tivon village would march last. At the barn of Tivon village they danced and sang all day until sunset".