



PORTION FROM THE PORTION

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The Personal Side Of Bikkurim

The verses at the beginning of this week's *parashah* describe the *mitzvah* of Bikkurim, the first fruits, including the declaration the farmer makes when bringing his basket to the *Beit Hamikdash*. The declaration is familiar because the Rabbis chose it as the basis for the *Maggid* section of the *Haggadah*. But why did the *Tannaim* choose these verses, which describe events generations after the Exodus, rather than the verses in *Sefer Shemot* where the Exodus itself unfolds?

Maybe the answer lies in the *mitzvah* of *Bikkurim*. The ceremony was festive and dramatic. When the first fruit ripened, the farmer marked it as *Bikkurim*. Later, people traveled together to Jerusalem with singing and music. Finally, the

farmers carried their baskets on their shoulders and made their declaration.

Each farmer begins his declaration in the singular: "I declare this day to *Hashem*, my God, that I have come to the land which He swore to our forefathers to give us." He then shifts to the plural: "The Egyptians treated us cruelly... *Hashem* brought us out of Egypt... and He gave us this land." Finally, he returns to the singular: "And now, I have brought the first fruit of the land which You, *Hashem*, have given me."



Nechama Leibowitz

Rashi explains that the purpose is that we should not be ungrateful. The declaration is an expression of gratitude to *Hashem*. But this gratitude is not only for something that happened to our ancestors long ago. Nechama Leibowitz points out the significance of the singular language. The farmer does not merely say that our ancestors were brought into the Land. He says, "I have come to the land." He is standing there himself. He is holding fruit that has grown for him from the Land, and he is thanking *Hashem* for bringing him there.

This may explain why these verses were chosen for the *Haggadah*. On Pesach night, we are commanded to see ourselves "as though

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he himself went out of Egypt.” The Exodus is not merely Jewish history; it is part of my own story.

The same is true of our arrival in the Land of Israel. Every generation must see itself not only as descended from those who left Egypt, but as having itself been brought to the Land. We must never take the Land for granted. *Bikkurim* transforms the great events of Jewish history—the Exodus, the journey through the wilderness, and the arrival in the Land—into something personal. The farmer stands in Jerusalem and declares: I was brought here. This Land was given to me. And this fruit is my first fruit.

I would like to take this opportunity to publicly thank *Hashem* for my own personal *Bikkurim*. I am not a farmer, although I do have grapes growing in my yard, and I look forward to the day when I will be able to bring them as *Bikkurim* to the *Beit Hamikdash*. Until then, I have another kind of “first fruit” for which to give thanks.

A month before *Pesach*, during the first days of the missile war with Iran, a project my daughter and I had worked on for three years finally came to fruition: a kit for creating a 3D pop-up *Haggadah* to use at the *Seder*. There is not enough space here to describe the *Haggadah* itself, but it can be seen at <https://haggada-zaza.my.canva.site/>. During such a frightening time, it felt like a tremendous miracle that we were able to complete the project. For three years, we had planted, worked, waited, and hoped to create something that would bring the *Haggadah* to life for children and families. When we brought two copies to the National Library, I felt something like what a farmer must have felt carrying his basket of *Bikkurim* to the *Beit Hamikdash*.

That is perhaps the deepest meaning of

Bikkurim: not simply to recognize that something good has happened, but to stop and acknowledge, through an elaborate ceremony, Who made it possible.

This *Haggadah* is dedicated in memory of Adam Bismuth, ד"ר, who inspired this project and was killed in Gaza. May his memory be a blessing, and may we soon merit to bring our first fruits to the *Beit Hamikdash* once again.

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Bikkurim are brought from the first fruits to ripen among the *Shivat HaMinim*, the seven species with which the Land of Israel is blessed. Since two of them — pomegranates and dates — are also among the symbolic foods traditionally served on *Rosh Hashanah* eve, this week’s easy and quick recipe combines the two, giving you a head start on your cooking for the upcoming holiday season.

Wishing everyone a **Shana Tova!**

DATE AND POMEGRANATE CHICKEN BREASTS

- 2 boneless, skinless chicken breasts
- 2 tablespoons olive oil
- 5 Medjool dates, pitted, checked and chopped
- 2 tablespoons pomegranate molasses
- 1/4 cup chicken broth or water
- 2 tablespoons fresh pomegranate seeds (for garnish)
- Salt and pepper, to taste
- Fresh parsley, chopped (optional)

Season chicken breasts with salt and pepper on both sides. Heat olive oil in a pan over medium-high heat. Add chicken and cook for 6 minutes (till golden brown). Flip the chicken and cook for 5 more minutes. Add the broth or water, pomegranate molasses, and chopped dates. Lower the heat, cover, and simmer for 5 minutes until the chicken is fully cooked. ■