



ג

UNITING LIFE

A BEAUTIFUL EXPRESSION OF GRATITUDE IS THE THEME OF THE beginning of the Sedra¹. G-d tells the Jewish people that when they enter the Land of Israel each farmer should gather the best of his first fruit every year and bring it to the Temple. There he gives the basket of fruit to the Priest, and makes an eloquent declaration, in gratitude “for the fruit of the land which You, G-d, have given me”.

The Sages tell us that unlike many other offerings, this First Fruit offering is not burnt on the altar: it is eaten by Priest. The Lubavitcher Rebbe presents an interesting perspective on this. The Torah is not only telling us about something relating to Temple times, but is giving us a teaching which is relevant in every epoch.

Each one of us, man and woman, strives during the course of our daily lives to achieve various goals, to produce “fruit”. This passage in the Torah is teaching that the best and most precious of the fruits of our efforts, of our worldly achievements, can be sanctified, like the fruit brought to the Temple. How are our worldly achievements sanctified?

Through gratitude to G-d, recognising that G-d gives us the strength, the will, the wisdom and the skill to achieve, to create, to win. This moment of recognition and appreciation is like the moment of bringing the first fruit into the Temple.

JUDAISM FOR TOMORROW'S WORLD
www.chabadresearch.net - cru@LubavitchUK.com

The Rebbe points out further, that in order to achieve this kind of sanctification of our worldly lives, we do not have to give the fruit away. Each of us, man and woman, has the power to be the 'Priest' in our own personal Temple. We become a Priest in this sense by trying to live in a way which is kosher and sacred according to the rules of Jewish teaching.

This means that, in order for us to be holy, our worldly success does not have to be given up, figuratively burnt on the altar. Just as the Priest actually eats and enjoys the First Fruit which is brought to him, so too each one of us can enjoy the fruits of our sanctified worldliness. The delicious taste of the fruit and of the achievement is itself part of our task to make this physical world into a dwelling for the Divine. The key point in this process is our ability to recognise that every detail of our achievements comes from G-d. Through this we gain access to the Temple, and learn the secret of how to transform worldliness into holiness².

This joining of the sacred and the worldly is a key theme in Chassidic teaching, as taught by Rabbi Yisrael Baal Shem Tov, the founder of Chassidism, and as explained in the books of Rabbi Shneur Zalman of Liadi, the founder of Chabad-Lubavitch. In fact this Shabbat, 18 Elul, celebrates the birthday of both the Baal Shem Tov (in 1698) and Rabbi Shneur Zalman (in 1745).

Before Chassidism, some ascetic rabbis thought of the holy and the worldly as two separate domains which could not join. They also mentally divided Jewish society into two classes, the scholars and the ignorant masses. They thought the scholars were far above the masses.

Chassidism taught that all aspects of life, both sacred and secular, are potentially joined together, and that all sections of the Jewish people are one, since the key teaching of Judaism is 'love your fellow as yourself'. Through the spreading of this sense of unity of our lives and of our people, with the coming of the Messiah we and all humanity will enjoy a united world.

1. Deuteronomy 26:1–29:8.2. Based freely on *Likkutei Sichot* vol.2, 390-392.

Torah teachings are holy - please treat this page with care

SPONSORED BY DR REUVEN JOEL



53

SEDRA KI TAVO

BEN THE GRAIN

His only comfort was that he was sure it was only a dream.

“It’s so hard to move” he thought. He felt as if he had no arms or legs. He felt packed together with other somethings, at first he couldn’t tell quite what they were, and he could barely see the sunlight shining through.

Ben looked carefully around him. He realized that he was surrounded by rows and rows of wheat grains, all fastened to stalks. It slowly dawned on him that he too was one of them: he was a simple grain of wheat.

“I just went to sleep as normal” he thought. “I said the Shema, put on my pyjamas, brushed my teeth, snuggled up in bed and started counting sheep till I must have fallen asleep, because I am sure that this is only a dream, I can’t really be a grain of wheat”.

Now he could see more of the sun, and he could peep beyond the other grains and see a large wheat field. He must be in a bundle of wheat which had been cut and bundled together. “Oh well” he thought with a sigh “I’ll just have to wait and see what happens”.

Suddenly he could sense movement around him. All the other grains were excited, and from what they were saying he realised that they might be the first fruits that he had learned so much about.

“Wow” he thought “I hope the farmer will choose us as first fruits and take us to Jerusalem!” Like the other grains

around him, he too was very excited and eager.

He had learned all about it in school. Every year each farmer in the Land of Israel would take the first of his crop to Jerusalem and give it to the Cohen, in the Temple. He didn't take just any fruit, it had to be from the special seven kinds of fruit and grain mentioned in the Torah: wheat, barley, grapes, figs, pomegranates, olives and dates. They also had to be the first and best of the crop.

His heart skipped a beat when he felt his bundle being scooped up by the farmer. "**Awesome!!!**" he thought, "I'll be going to Jerusalem".

He was slightly disappointed when he found himself in a simple straw basket, quite near the bottom. All the other fruit was pressing on top of him, only some barley was underneath. He felt that if he was so special he deserved a more honourable mode of transportation. He wasn't comfortable at all. Is this how it is meant to be? How do the others feel about it?

"Don't worry" a neighbouring friendly grain explained. "I heard that this is what it would be like. Someone said that we are like the soul which is so spiritual and holy before it is born. Then it is happy to be chosen to be sent in to the world to try and make it a better place, so it gets born. But then the soul finds itself faced with all the challenges of life and it isn't so thrilled anymore. We were all happy to be chosen and put in the basket, but now we have to face all the challenges of the journey".

"Yes" Ben the grain said, sniffing "that is just how I feel".

"In the end" his friend said "you will see that our basket will be lifted up and put on the shoulder of the farmer, and he will take us into the Temple. In the course of life a person overcomes all the challenges and goes higher and higher".

And then Ben woke up, with the sunlight streaming into his room. Time to get up!

***Torah teachings are holy –
please treat this page with care***