

# OHRNET

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## PARSHA INSIGHTS

by Rabbi Yaakov Asher Sinclair

### Expressing Thanks

*“You will come to whoever is the kohen in those days and you will say to him...” (26:3)*

A blisteringly hot Wednesday.

Suddenly there’s a power outage. A visit from the electrician reveals the worst: “It’s the compressor in your A/C. You need a new one. Trouble is, the manufacturer can only get it here next Tuesday.”

“But what are we going to do on Shabbat?”

“Does your Shabbat table fit in the fridge? Listen, I think I can get you a new compressor before Shabbat. I’ll do my best.”

“You’re a *tzaddik!*”

And sure enough, by Thursday lunchtime the new compressor is in place and the house returns to its regular cool temperature.

On Friday afternoon the electrician’s phone rings. He notes the caller ID – it’s the people with the new compressor.

“Trouble,” he thinks to himself as he answers the phone.

“We just wanted to call you and thank you so much for fixing our air conditioner. You’ve really made our Shabbat. Thank you so much! Shabbat Shalom!”

Gratitude should never remain implicit. It should be expressed.

In this week’s portion, the Torah instructs us to give *bikkurim* – the first fruits – to the *kohen*. However, it’s not enough just to give them.

*“You will come to whoever is the kohen in those days and you shall say to him....”* Rashi comments on the phrase *“and you shall say to him”* – *“because you are not an ingrate.”* In other words, what prevents a person from being an ingrate is the verbalization of his gratitude. Anything less is considered lacking.

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# Q & A

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## Questions

1. When did the obligation to bring *bikkurim* begin?
2. *Bikkurim* are from which crops?
3. How does one designate *bikkurim*?
4. Who shakes the basket containing the *bikkurim*?
5. What does "*v'anita v'amarta*" mean?
6. Which Arami "tried to destroy my father?"
7. When during the year may *bikkurim* be brought? Until when are the special verses recited?
8. Someone declaring that he separated *terumah* and *ma'aser* says: "And I didn't forget." What didn't he forget?
9. What were the Jewish People to do with the 12 stones on Mount Eval?
10. Six tribes stood on Mount Eval and six on Mount Gerizim. Who and what were in the middle?
11. Who "causes the blind to go astray"?
12. How does one "strike another secretly"?
13. Eleven curses were spoken on Mount Eval. What is the significance of this number?
14. Why are sheep called "*ashterot*"?
15. How is the manner of expressing the curses in Parshat Bechukotai more severe than in this week's parsha?

*All references are to the verses and Rashi's commentary, unless otherwise stated.*

## Answers

1. 26:1 - After the Land was conquered and divided.
2. 26:2 - The seven species for which *Eretz Yisrael* is praised.
3. 26:2 - When he sees the first fruit ripen on a tree, he binds a piece of straw around it to mark it as *bikkurim*.
4. 26:4 - The *kohen* places his hands under the hands of the one bringing it, and they wave the basket together.
5. 26:5 - Speak loudly.
6. 26:5 - Lavan.
7. 26:11 - *Bikkurim* are brought from Shavuot until Chanukah. The verses are recited only until Succot.
8. 26:13 - To bless G-d.
9. 27:2 - Build an altar.
10. 27:12 - *Kohanim*, *levi'im* and the Holy Ark.
11. 27:18 - Any person who intentionally gives bad advice.
12. 27:24 - By slandering him.
13. 27:24 - Each curse corresponds to one of the tribes, except for the tribe of Shimon. Since Moshe didn't intend to bless the tribe of Shimon before his death, he did not want to curse it either.
14. 28:4 - Because they "enrich" (*m'ashiro*) their owners.
15. 28:23 - In Bechukotai the Torah speaks in the plural, whereas in this week's *parsha* the curses are mentioned in the singular.

# WHAT'S IN A WORD?

## Synonyms in the Hebrew Language

by Rabbi Reuven Chaim Klein

### A Basket Case

When the Torah speaks about bringing the first fruits to Jerusalem in baskets, it uses a non-standard word for “basket”: *tene*. The standard Hebrew word for “basket” is *sal* – which appears fifteen times throughout the Bible. By contrast, the word *tene* appears only four times in the entire Bible, all of them in Ki Tavo (Deut. 26:2, 26:4, 28:5, and 28:17). In this essay we will seek to better understand the differences between the words *tene* and *sal*, and how those words relate to another handful of synonyms for “basket.”

Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch (to Num. 19:20, Ps. 3:3) writes that the word *sal* literally means “to lift,” because a basket’s main purpose is to help a person lift and carry various items. Rabbi Hirsch compares this word to *sulam* (“ladder” up which one climbs), *solelah* (high mound used for circumventing city walls), and *mesilah* (road that goes up a mountain), which all have the two-letter string SAMECH-LAMMED.

Rabbi Hirsch’s explanation fits with Rabbi Aharon Marcus’ (1843-1916) theory to explain the etymology of the word *sela* (“rock”). Rabbi Marcus proposed that in all Hebrew words whose root is comprised of the biliteral string SAMECH-LAMMED, the SAMECH is actually a placeholder for the letter AYIN that follows it. In other words, when a word’s root seems to be SAMECH-LAMMED, it should really be understood as AYIN-LAMMED. The letters AYIN-LAMMED refer to something “on top” (*al/lemalah*) of something else, or something which is “elevated” or “ascends upward” (*oleh/alayah*). Based on this, Rabbi Marcus suggested that the word *sela* refers to something which “comes up” – i.e. a rock which “comes up” from underground. According to Rabbi Hirsch, the word *sal* also refers to

“elevation,” as it is the vessel used to “lift up” various items and carry them elsewhere.

Rabbi Shlomo Pappenheim (1740-1814) offers a different take on the SAMECH-LAMMED root. He explains that this two-letter root refers to things related to repeated actions. For example, the word *mesilah* (“road”) is derived from this root because it is a well-travelled path upon which many have trodden. Similarly, one who constantly twists and twirls one’s hair is said to be *misalsel* (*Rosh Hashanah* 26b) because he repeatedly does the same action. In that spirit, Rabbi Pappenheim explains that *sal* refers specifically to a “bread basket” (see Gen. 40:16, Lev. 8:2), because it is an item in constant, daily use. This notwithstanding, Rabbi Pappenheim admits that the term *sal* can refer to any sort of basket in a borrowed sense, even a basket of meat (Jud. 6:19) or grapes (Jer. 6:9).

That said, Dr. Chaim Tawil points out that the Hebrew word *sal* actually seems to derive from the Akkadian word *sallu*, which also means “basket.”

In all four places that the word *tene* appears in the Bible, the Targum translates it into the Aramaic *sala*, an Aramaicized version of the Hebrew word *sal*. In Talmudic parlance the word *teni* means the same as *tene*. But where does the word *tene* come from?

Unlike *sal*, which he maintains refers to a basket used for “bread,” Rabbi Pappenheim explains that *tene* refers to a basket used specifically for fruits. Such baskets were typically woven with extra space to allow air to waft through, thus ensuring that the fruits will not spoil. Rabbi Pappenheim argues that the letter ALEPH of *tene* is a radical, while its actual root is just TET-NUN. He explains that the word *eitun* (Prov. 7:16) also derives from this root,

and it refers to clothing woven in such a way that more air is allowed through. Rabbi Yaakov Tzvi Mecklenburg (1785-1865) adds that the TET-NUN element in the word *shaatnez* refers to “weaving,” as well.

Like Rabbi Pappenheim, Rabbi Aharon Marcus also connects *tene* to *eitun*. But he argues that both words are actually of Egyptian origin. Indeed, master etymologist Rabbi Dr. Ernest Klein (1899-1983) confirms *tene*’s status as an Egyptian loanword.

Interestingly, Rabbi David Chaim Chelouche (1920-2016), the late Chief Rabbi of Netanya, connects the word *tene* to *beten* (“stomach”), as a basket has an open “cavity” into which people can put things, just like a stomach has.

There are two more words in Biblical Hebrew for “basket”: *keluv* and *dud*. In one instance, the word *keluv* (Amos 8:1) refers to a basket into which one puts undeveloped figs, while in the other instance, *keluv* (Jer. 5:27) refers to a basket into which one placed birds in order to fatten them up. Based on this second usage, Modern Hebrew redefines *keluv* as a “bird cage” or even “animal cage” in general. The word *dud* sometimes means “basket” (see Jer. 24:1-2), but sometimes means “pot” (I Sam. 2:14, II Chron. 35:13), both of which are fashioned in practically the same shape.

The word *kalkalah* in the sense of “basket” appears multiple times in the Mishnah (see *Peah* 7:3, *Dema* 7:6, *Terumot* 4:6, *Maasrot* 1:5, 4:2, *Shabbos* 20:3, 21:1, *Eruvin* 3:8, *Kiddushin* 2:7, *Keilim* 16:2, 22:9). Rabbi Tanchum HaYerushalmi (a 13th century exegete who lived in the Holy Land) writes that a *kalkalah* is an especially big *sal* that people would typically use to store all sorts of foods. Because its contents generally provide sustenance and nourishment, the word for this type of basket is a cognate of the verb *kalkal* (see, for example, Gen. 47:12) which means “to sustain.” Another word for “basket” in Mishnaic Hebrew

is *kefifah* (sometimes spelled with a KUF and sometimes with a KAF). This term seems to refer specifically to a “wicker basket” (see *Shabbos* 2:2, *Sotah* 2:1, 3:1, *Keilim* 26:1).

In the Talmudic vernacular there are another eight Hebrew/Aramaic words for “basket.” How they differ from one another is not readily apparent or addressed by the commentators, but from context clues we can hone in on their exact meanings:

- *Dikula* (*Chullin* 32b) seems to refer specifically to a basket made from the bast of a *dekel*, the Hebrew word for “palm tree” (see Rashi to *Shabbos* 90b).
- *Gridia* means “vegetable basket” (see Rashi to *Sotah* 10a).
- *Traskal* refers to a wide “basket” that is typically filled with barley and hung around an animal’s neck so that it can eat more easily (see Rashi to *Shabbos* 5a, 53a and *Eruvin* 33b).
- *Tzana* (see Rashi to *Chullin* 57a and Rashbam to *Bava Basra* 126b) also means “basket,” and Rabbi Dr. Ernest Klein explains that it refers to a basket made out of thorns (related to the Biblical Hebrew word *tzan*, see Num. 33:55, Prov. 22:5, Amos 4:2).
- *Kelet* refers to a vase-shaped basket that women used to wear on their heads (*Kesubos* 72b, 82b, *Gittin* 77a, *Bava Basra* 85b, and *Bava Meztia* 9b).
- *Sharkafa* seems to be a basket in which one placed birds (see *Chullin* 53b, with Rashi and Tosafos there).
- *Tuwila* was apparently a basket used for harvesting dates (see Rashi and Rabbeinu Gershon to *Bava Basra* 33b).
- *Tirina* (*Pesachim* 88a) seems to have been a special basket for date fruits.

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## PARSHA OVERVIEW

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**W**hen the Jewish People dwell in the Land of Israel, its first fruits are to be taken to the Temple and given to the *kohen*. This is done in a ceremony that expresses recognition that it is G-d who guides the history of the Jewish People throughout all ages. This passage forms one of the central parts of the Pesach Haggadah that we read at the Seder.

On the last day of Pesach of the fourth and seventh years of the seven-year *shemitta* cycle, a person must recite a disclosure stating that he has indeed distributed the tithes to the appropriate people in the prescribed manner. With this mitzvah Moshe concludes the commandments that Hashem has told him to give to the Jewish People. Moshe exhorts them to walk in Hashem's ways because they are set aside as a treasured people to Him.

When the Jewish People cross the Jordan River they are to make a new commitment to the Torah. Huge stones are to be erected and the Torah is to be written on them in the world's seventy primary languages, after which they are to be covered over with a thin layer of plaster. Half the tribes are to stand on Mount Gerizim, and half on Mount Eval, and the *levi'im* will stand in a valley between the two mountains. The *levi'im* will recite twelve commandments, and all the people will answer "amen" to the blessings and the curses. Moshe then details the blessings that will be bestowed upon the Jewish People, blessings that are both physical and spiritual. However, if the Jewish People do not keep the Torah, Moshe details a chilling picture of destruction, resulting in exile and wandering among the nations.

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## LETTER AND SPIRIT

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*Insights based on the writings of Rav S.R. Hirsch by Rabbi Yosef Herschman*

### Curse of Hypocrisy

**M**oshe instructs the people that when they come to the Land they are to arrange themselves on two opposing mountains, Har Gerizim and Har Eival, for a public proclamation ceremony. In the middle, between the two mountains, stood the elder *kohanim* and *levi'im*, who pronounced those acts which bring about curse and their counterpart acts which bring about blessing. The entire nation would answer "amen," in an affirmation that G-d's rule alone dispenses blessing and curse.

The subjects of the curses include: secret worship of idolatry, slighting one's father or mother, moving the boundary of one's neighbor (so as to increase one's own property), misleading a blind man, infringing the rights of an orphan, stranger or widow, various prohibited incestuous relationships, 'hitting' one's fellow in private (i.e. slander), acceptance of a bribe to convict someone, and, finally, not upholding the words of the Torah to carry them out. This list is followed by a repertoire of blessings that will overwhelm he who conscientiously carries out the mitzvahs.

The content and order of the cursed behaviors are significant. Growth, prosperity and success will be withheld from one who outwardly is pious, but privately denies G-d; one who outwardly shows respect for his parents, but inwardly despises them; one who develops an honest reputation, but infringes on the rights of his neighbor; one who grovels before the high and mighty, but does not help the weak and helpless; the hypocrite

who poses as respectable, but in private indulges in sexual licentiousness; one who does not openly hurt his neighbor but kills his happiness and honor in conversations with others; one who enjoys a position of authority and trust but abuses his power by corruption in secret.

These are sins which by their nature are done with some degree of secrecy. Because they are not in full view, they cannot be effectively monitored by society or the justice system. For this reason they are placed under the rule of G-d's dispensation of blessing and curse.

Notice that the list of sins comprises social sins (disrespect for parents, infringement of neighbor's property rights, slander, bribery) interrupted by a list of sexual sins. The juxtaposition is meant to equate the severity of social sins and sexual sins, and to disabuse us of two opposite notions: (1) while social sins should be condemned as a menace to society, sexual sins are less serious as they do not affect the public welfare, and (2) while forbidden incestuous relationships weigh heavily on the Jewish conscience, social sins such as slander are less serious. The intermingled list refutes both of these notions, and establishes the equal severity of both types.

The final curse is unique in that it curses *inaction*. All the other sins that come under the curse are active violations – and, by contrast, the promise of blessing applies to one who does no more than refrain from violating prohibitions. The final pronouncement of the curse declares, *cursed is he who does not uphold the words of this Torah to carry them out*. This applies to one who is personally faithful, but does not do his part to ensure the Law is observed in the wider community. Similarly, blessing will come to one who uses his persuasion and abilities to uphold the Torah. It is only in this instance that indifference brings curse. Blessing will be full only when everyone does his share to uphold the Torah.

- Sources: Commentary, Devarim 27:15-26

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