FIRST FRUITS

Rabbi Dan Moskovitz – Sept 13, 2014

1. Parshat Ki Tavo (Deuteronomy 26:1-29:8)
2. Mitzvah of Bikurim
    a. The process of bringing the first fruits to the Temple.
    b. Celebratory occasion, providing an opportunity to thank God for the bounty of the harvest.
3. To help us articulate our gratitude, the parsha provides a script of what to say once the fruit basket has been handed to the priest and set before the altar.
    a. You bring you full fruit basket and you declare to the priest and all assembled:
    b. My father was a fugitive Aramean. He went down to Egypt with meager numbers and sojourned there; but there he became a great and very populous nation. The Egyptians dealt harshly with us and oppressed us; they imposed heavy labor upon us. We cried to the LORD, the God of our fathers, and the LORD heard our plea and saw our plight, our misery, and our oppression. The LORD freed us from Egypt by a mighty hand, by an outstretched arm and awesome power, and by signs and portents. He brought us to this place and gave us this land, a land flowing with milk and honey. Wherefore I now bring the first fruits of the soil which You, O LORD, have given me.
4. DISCUSSION:
    a. Notice that this declaration begins in the first person singular ("my father was a fugitive Aramean") and then switches to the first person plural ("the Egyptians dealt harshly with us"). Finally, the declaration switches back to the first person singular ("wherefore I now bring the first fruits").

        i. Why would the speaker shift voices from the singular, to the plural, and then back to the singular?
5. Anyone reciting these lines could not help but be struck by the magnitude of the historical events which have enabled him to visit the Temple on this day.
    a. The process goes as follows:
        i. We were slaves in Egypt;
        ii. God heard our cries;
        iii. God freed us from oppression;
        iv. God brought us to the land of Israel and gave us the soil therein;
        v. We then planted fruits on that soil.
6. The basket of fruits is a manifestation of far more than our gratitude for agricultural bounty. It is a symbol of ALL that God has done for us in redeeming us from slavery and bringing us to independent existence on our own soil.
7. And when we flip the plural to singular as our text does so fluidly – the basket is not only a symbol of our collective redemption, but my personal redemption.
    a. All that I have, all that I am is because of Sinai, because of Torah, because God took notice, heard my prayers and brought me out of the narrowness of my life before and gave my life meaning through Judaism.