



The Inner Connection between the Mitzvah of Bikkurim and the Declaration: “An Arami would have destroyed my father, and he descended to Mitzrayim”

In this week’s parsha, parshas Ki Savo, we will focus on the confession HKB”H commanded the bringer of bikkurim to pronounce (Devarim 26, 5): “וענית ואמרת לפני ה' אלקיך ארמי אובד אבי” “**Then you shall call out and say before Hashem, your G-d, “An Arami would have destroyed my father, and he descended to Mitzrayim and sojourned there, few in number, and there he became a nation—great, strong and numerous.”** We will attempt to explain the connection between the mitzvah of bikkurim and the fact that Lavan HaArami schemed to destroy Yaakov and ultimately caused his descent to Mitzrayim.

Additionally, narrative connects the fact that “**an Arami would have destroyed my father**” and “**he descended to Mitzrayim**”; this, too, deserves clarification. After all, many years passed between Yaakov’s return from Charan to Eretz Canaan until he went down to Mitzrayim. According to the Torah’s chronicling of events, Yaakov returned from Charan six years after the birth of Yosef. Yosef was sold into slavery and landed in Mitzrayim when he was seventeen years old. Yaakov was separated from Yosef and descended to Mitzrayim twenty-two years later. So, why does the narrative connect “**an Arami would have destroyed my father**” and “**he descended to Mitzrayim**”?

Lavan HaArami and Bilam Are One and the Same

We will begin our investigation with a sacred insight from the Chasam Sofer related to this passuk: “**An Arami would have destroyed my father, and he descended to Mitzrayim.**” He refers to the following Gemara (Sanhedrin

106a): “שלשה היו באותה עצה אלו הן, בלעם ואיוב ויתרו, בלעם שיעץ נהרג, איוב ששתק נידון ביסורין, ויתרו שברח זכו מבני בניו לישב בלשכת הגזית.” **Three participated in that advice** (“Let us deal with them wisely”)—**Bilam, Iyov and Yisro. Bilam, who proffered advice (to drown the babies of Yisrael) was killed; Iyov, who remained silent, was subjected to afflictions; Yisro, who fled, his descendants merited sitting in the Chamber of Hewn Stone** (as members of the Sanhedrin).

Now, let us introduce the comment of the Targum YoNasan on the passuk (Bamidbar 22, 5): “**וישלח מלאכים אל בלעם בן בעור**”—**he sent messengers to Bilam the son of Beor.** This passuk informs us that he sent messengers to “**Lavan HaArami, who is Bilam.**” He was called **Bilam**, whose name can be broken down to “**בל עם**”, indicating that he planned to swallow up the people of Yisrael. The Arizal explains that the wicked Bilam was a gilgul of Lavan HaArami, who had previously schemed to undermine and sabotage everything.

Along these lines, in relation to the war with Midian (Bamidbar 31, 8), the Targum YoNasan comments that when Pinchas pursued Bilam to kill him, Bilam whispered words of sorcery and flew in the air. Pinchas responded by mentioning the sacred name of Hashem, flew after him, caught him by his hair and said to him: **You are none other than Lavan HaArami who wanted to destroy Yaakov Avinu; you went down to Mitzrayim to destroy his offspring; subsequently, when they departed Mitzrayim, you instigated the wicked Amalek against them; now, you confronted Yisrael to curse them; immediately, he drew his sword and killed him.** In other words, Lavan HaArami is Bilam, who advised Pharaoh to exterminate Yisrael and, afterwards, came to curse them in the midbar.

So, this is how the Chasam Sofer interprets the passuk: **“An Arami schemed to destroy my father”**—when Lavan pursued Yaakov, he intended to destroy him; however, when he realized that he could not succeed, because HKB”H admonished him not to harm Yaakov; **“he descended to Mitzrayim”**—Lavan HaArami himself descended to Mitzrayim to destroy Yaakov’s offspring in an effort to accomplish his initial goal. There, too, he was thwarted; HKB”H protected Yaakov once again: **“He (Yaakov) sojourned there, few in number, and there he became a nation—great, strong and numerous.”**

The Neshamos of Yisrael Were Concealed within the Flocks of Lavan

We will now delight in the incredible commentary of the Chakal Yitzchak (Vayeitzei). To interpret this passuk—**“An Arami schemed to destroy my father, and he descended to Mitzrayim”**—he relies on a precious teaching from our sacred sefarim. They teach us that the neshamos of the generation of the mabul, the generation of dispersion and the populace of Sedom reincarnated into the sheep of Lavan HaArami. It was for this reason that HKB”H arranged for Yaakov Avinu to go to Charan and shepherd Lavan’s flocks. This enabled him to remove all of those neshamos from the clutches of Lavan. As a result of the tikun afforded them by Yaakov with his immense kedushah, they subsequently reincarnated into human beings again—as the neshamos of Yisrael in Mitzrayim, where they were rectified further by the difficult servitude and bondage.

Let us attempt to clarify the comments of the righteous Chakal Yitzchak, zy”a. His sacred remarks are based on the teachings of the Arizal in Sha’ar HaPesukim (Shemos). There we learn that the neshamos of Yisrael in Mitzrayim were part of Adam HaRishon when he sinned with the Eitz HaDa’as. They initially reincarnated into the generation of the mabul, where they behaved corruptly. Next, they reincarnated into the generation of the dispersion, where they rebelled against Hashem. Afterwards, they reincarnated into the populace of Sedom, who were extremely evil and sinful. Ultimately, they reincarnated into Yisrael in Mitzrayim, where they achieved their tikun.

Corresponding to their punishment in the generation of the mabul—the flood—Pharaoh decreed (Shemos 1, 22): **“כל הבן היולד היאורה תשליכוהו”**—**every male child that will be**

born, you shall throw him into the river. Just as they were punished by water during the generation of the mabul; so, too, they were subjected to punishment by water in Mitzrayim. In the generation of the dispersion (Bereishis 11, 3): **“ויאמרו איש אל רעהו הבה נלכנה לבנים ונשרפה לשרפה, ותהי להם הלכנה לאבן והחמר היה להם לחומר”**—**each man said to his fellow, “Come, let us make bricks and burn them in fire.” And the brick served them as stone, and the bitumen served them as plaster.** Hence, they were punished correspondingly in Mitzrayim (Shemos 1, 10): **“וימררו את חייהם בעבודה קשה בחומר ובלבנים”**—**they embittered their lives with hard work, with mortar and with bricks.**

The Explanation of the Neizer Kodesh concerning the Neshamos that Reincarnated into Lavan’s Flocks

Let us introduce another precious insight concerning the neshamos of Yisrael in Mitzrayim. It does not appear in the teachings of the Arizal but rather in the Neizer Kodesh, a commentary on the Midrash authored by the divine kabbalist Rabbi Yechiel Michel of Galona, ztz”l. Initially, all of these neshamos reincarnated into the flocks of Lavan. When Yaakov Avinu was the shepherd of those flocks, he removed them from Lavan’s possession, and they reincarnated into the neshamos of Yisrael in Mitzrayim.

This is deduced from Yaakov’s remark to Lavan (Bereishis 30, 6): **“כי מעט אשר היה לך לפני ויפרוץ לרוב ויברך ה' אותך לרגלי”**—**for the little you had before I came has multiplied substantially as Hashem has blessed you with my coming.** The Midrash (B.R. 73, 6) teaches us just how small Lavan’s flock was prior to Yaakov’s arrival: **נאמר כאן מעט ונאמר להלן מעט [ויגר: “שבעים נפש, נאמר כאן מעט ונאמר להלן מעט (דברים י-כב) בשבעים נפש ירדו אבותיך שם] במתי מעט, מה להלן שבעים (דברים י-כב) בשבעים נפש ירדו אבותיך”** **seventy souls; the text employs the term “מעט” here and it also employs the term “מעט” later on (Devarim 26, 5) . . . just as it means seventy there . . . so, too, here it means seventy.** In other words, prior to Yaakov’s arrival, Lavan’s flock numbered a mere seventy sheep.

Afterwards, the Midrash (ibid. 73, 11) teaches us the degree of Yaakov’s success (Bereishis 30, 43): **“The man became exceedingly prosperous (‘במאד מאד’)—how many sheep did he have? Six hundred thousand flocks of sheep.** According to the Yifeh To’ar, we learn this from a “gezeirah shavah.” Here, the passuk says **“מאד מאד”**, and with regards to Bnei Yisrael in Mitzrayim, it says (Shemos 1, 7): **“ויעצמו במאד מאד”**. So, just as

Bnei Yisrael numbered six hundred thousand there; so, too, the number of sheep here numbered six hundred thousand.

At first glance, we can only wonder: What is the connection between the seventy souls that went down to Mitzrayim and increased to six hundred thousand and the number of Lavan's sheep that initially numbered seventy and increased to six hundred thousand under Yaakov's supervision? So, the Neizer Kodesh explains that the reason Yaakov Avinu became a shepherd for Lavan was to rescue the sheep into whom those neshamos had reincarnated.

Yaakov Avinu Was a Gilgul of Adam HaRishon

As we have learned before, when Adam HaRishon sinned with the Eitz HaDa'as, he contained within him all of the future neshamos; hence, they participated in his sin. Subsequently, they reincarnated into Lavan's sheep. Now, we have also learned that Yaakov Avinu was a gilgul and tikun of Adam HaRishon, as stated in the Gemara (B.M. 84a): "שופריה דייעקב—**the radiance of Yaakov Avinu resembled the radiance of Adam HaRishon.** Therefore, it was Yaakov's task to remove them from Lavan's flocks and take possession of them. He tended to them and rectified them, so that they could eventually reincarnate into the neshamos of Yisrael in Mitzrayim.

Based on this premise, the Neizer Kodesh asserts that Yaakov devised many tricks and strategies to heal those neshamos, such as the intricate procedure with the rods in the sheep's troughs. Thus, the sheep came into his possession. He was truly a tzaddik; he did not perform these acts for monetary gain, chas v'shalom; on the contrary, his sole aim was to return those sheep to the realm of kedushah. Ultimately, they were elevated to the status of "adam"—members of the nation of Yisrael.

This explains very nicely why the Midrash compares the number of Lavan's sheep with the number of Yisrael in Mitzrayim. As explained, the neshamos of Yisrael in Mitzrayim had previously reincarnated into Lavan's sheep. When they subsequently reincarnated into the physical bodies of Bnei Yisrael in Mitzrayim, they completed their tikun in preparation for receiving the Torah. In a similar vein, the Kedushas Levi interprets the passuk (ibid. 29, 9): "זרחל באה עם הצאן"—**Rachel had come with the flock**—Rachel came with the holy flock containing the neshamos of Yisrael.

It appears that the comments of the Chakal Yitzchak are a fantastic synthesis of the ideas of the Neizer HaKodesh and the Arizal. According to the Arizal, the neshamos of Yisrael that were tainted by the "cheit Eitz HaDa'as" reincarnated initially into the generation of the mabul, subsequently into the generation of the dispersion and the populace of Sedom, and ultimately into the generations in Mitzrayim, where they achieved their tikun. According to the Neizer HaKodesh, we learned that prior to landing in Mitzrayim, the neshamos that sinned with the Eitz HaDa'as also reincarnated into the sheep of Lavan. The Chakal Yitzchak concludes that all of these neshamos reincarnated into the flocks of Lavan until Yaakov came, freed them from Lavan and rectified them. This allowed them to reincarnate into the neshamos of Yisrael in Mitzrayim to complete their tikun.

Yaakov's Flocks Were Tainted by Lavan's Evil Influence

Let us continue to explore the comments of the Chakal Yitzchak apropos the passuk: "**An Arami sought to destroy my father, and he descended to Mitzrayim.**" He begins by focusing on the passuk (ibid. 31, 36): "ויחר ליעקב וירב בלבן ויען יעקב ויאמר ללבן מה פשעי מה חטאתי כי דלקת אחרי, כי מששת את כל כלי יעקב ויאמר ללבן מה פשעי מה חטאתי כי דלקת אחרי, כי מששת את כל כלי." **Then Yaakov became angry, and he took up his grievance with Lavan; Yaakov spoke up and said to Lavan, "What is my transgression? What is my sin, that you have pursued me? When you rummaged through all my things, what did you find of all your household objects?"** Why wasn't Yaakov's tikun of the holy neshamos mired in Lavan's flock enough? Why didn't they achieve an immediate tikun without having to endure additional suffering in Mitzrayim?

To answer this perplexing question, the Chakal Yitzchak applies the known fact that the touch of a tzaddik's holy hands possesses healing powers and imparts kedushah. For instance, the powers of the holy Sar Shalom of Belz, zy"u, are famous; he was able to cure the ill with the touch of his holy hands. Similarly, Naaman said of Elisha HaNavi (Melachim II 5, 11): "והניף ידו אל המקום ואסף המצורע"—**and he would wave his hand over the affected area, and the leper ("metzora") would be healed.** Conversely, when a wicked person touches an object with his impure hands, the opposite is true; he contaminates them and corrupts them.

We can suggest that this explains why Yaakov said to Lavan (Bereishis 31, 32): “הכר לך מה עמדי וקח לך”—**ascertain for yourself what is with me and take it back.** He wanted Lavan to take what belonged to him but to take care not to touch objects belonging to Yaakov with his impure hands. Lavan did not comply, however, as it is written (ibid. 34): “וימשש לבן את כל האהל ולא מצא”—**Lavan rummaged through the entire tent, but he did not find.** Since Lavan touched and felt all of Yaakov’s flocks, he contaminated them severely. Hence, they required further tikun in Mitzrayim.

This provoked Yaakov’s angry response: “**What is my transgression? What is my sin, that you have pursued me? When you rummaged through all my things . . .**” He was asking Lavan why he had touched all of his possessions with his impure hands. He knew that as a result of that contamination, the neshamos concealed in his flocks would have to reincarnate again in Mitzrayim. This then is the significance of the passuk: “**An Arami sought to destroy my father**”—he spoiled Yaakov’s efforts to rectify the neshamos that had reincarnated into his flocks by touching them with his impure hands. As a consequence, “**he descended to Mitzrayim**” with all of those neshamos to complete their tikun there. This is the gist of his sacred remarks.

The Mitzvah of Bikkurim Is a Tikun for the Cheit Eitz HaDa’as

In this manner, we can proceed to explain the connection between the mitzvah of bringing bikkurim and the declaration: “ארמי אובר אבי וירד מצרימה”. According to the Rambam (Hilchos Bikkurim 3, 10), this declaration associated with the bikkurim qualifies as a “vidui”—a confession: **It is a mitzvas aseh to confess in the Mikdash over the bikkurim, when he brings them. He begins by reciting: “I declare today to Hashem, your G-d, that I have come to the land . . .” Then he continues: “An Arami sought to destroy my father” and completes the passage until: “that You have given me, Hashem!”**

The commentaries are baffled as to where the Rambam learned that this declaration is categorized as a “vidui.” Some say that the Rambam’s source is the Mishnah (Bikkurim 2, 2): “יש במעשר וביכורים מה שאין כן בתרומה, שהמעשר והביכורים טעונים הבאת מקום וטעונים וידוי”—**there are laws practiced with regards to “ma’aser” and “bikkurim” that are not practiced with regards to terumah; for “ma’aser” and “bikkurim”**

require a specific location (namely, they must be brought up to Yerushalayim), **and they require “vidui.”** Thus, we have an explicit source stating that the declaration made over the bikkurim is a form of “vidui.” Now, it is incumbent upon us to explain the nature of this confession and why this confession is necessary.

We will attempt to explain the matter by referring to Rashi’s commentary which is based on a Mishnah in Maseches Bikkurim (3, 1): “אדם יורד לתוך שדהו ורואה תאנה שביכרה... כורך עליה: **When a man goes down into his field and sees a ripe fig . . . he wraps a reed-grass around it as a sign and declares: “This is hereby bikkurim.”** I saw an interesting insight in the sefer Ohalei Shem, authored by the divine kabbalist Rabbi Shem Klingberg, ztz”l, hy”d. The Mishnah teaches us (ibid.) that “bikkurim” are only brought from the seven species—“shivat haminim.” So, from all the seven species, why did Rashi specifically choose to mention a fig that ripened as an example?

He explains with the following chiddush: Bringing a minchah of “bikkurim” serves as a tikun for the “cheit Eitz HaDa’as.” According to one opinion in the Gemara (Berachos 40a), the forbidden fruit was a fig: “אילן שאכל ממנו אדם הראשון... רבי נחמיה אומר תאנה היתה, שבדבר שנתקלקלו בו נתקנו, שנאמר ויתפרו עלה תאנה”. Rabbi Nechemiah is of the opinion that the tree from which Adam HaRishon ate was a fig tree. For, it states subsequently (Bereishis 3, 7) that they sewed together a fig leaf to cover up their nakedness. Thus, it stands to reason that the remedy came from the same source as the transgression—the fig tree. That being the case, we must endeavor to understand how bringing a minchah of “bikkurim” constitutes a tikun for the “cheit Eitz HaDa’as.”

We can suggest that this explains very nicely the specific language employed by Rabeinu HaKadosh in the Mishnah: **When an “adam” goes down into his field.** He employs the term “adam” to allude to the fact that when a man goes into his field to separate bikkurim, he should have in mind that he was a part of **Adam** HaRishon at the time of the fateful sin. Hence, when he finds a **ripe fig**, he ties a reed around it, sanctifies it as bikkurim and brings it to the kohen in the Beis HaMikdash to make amends for his part in the “cheit Eitz HaDa’as.” This explains very nicely why reciting the passage of the bikkurim qualifies as a “vidui”; it is necessary to confess our culpability in the “cheit Eitz HaDa’as.”

This illuminates for us the reason we mention “**an Arami sought to destroy my father**” in this confession associated with the bringing of bikkurim. After all, Lavan HaArami sought to prevent Yaakov from rectifying the neshamos in his flocks that had reincarnated after their participation in the “cheit Eitz HaDa’as.” Upon realizing that he had failed in this endeavor and, furthermore, that all of those neshamos stood to achieve their tikun in Mitzrayim, Lavan HaArami himself descended to Mitzrayim as a gilgul in the person of Bilam. There, he schemed with Pharaoh to destroy them. As we know, HKB”H thwarted his malevolent plans. All of this is included in the confession for one’s guilt in the “cheit Eitz HaDa’as,” whose tikun is achieved by the bringing of bikkurim.

The Incredible Explanation of the Bris Kehunas Olam

At this point, it gives me great pleasure to present to our royal audience a novel interpretation based on the methodology of “remez”—allusion—of the passuk: “ארמי אוֹבֵד” “ביקש יעקב לגלות לבניו קץ הימין ונסתלקה ממנו שכינה, אמר שמה חס ושלום יש במטתי פסול, כאברהם שיצא ממנו ישמעאל ואבי יצחק שיצא ממנו עשו. אמרו לו בניו, שמע ישראל ה' אלקינו ה' אחד, אמרו כשם שאין בלבך אלא אחד.” Yaakov wished to reveal to his sons secrets pertaining to the final geulah; however, the Shechinah abandoned him, and he was deprived of divine inspiration. This led him to suspect that one of his sons might be unworthy; they reassured him with the response “שמע ישראל ה' אלקינו ה' אחד”—communicating the fact that just as he worshipped but one master, so, too, did they.

In Gur Aryeh, the Maharal teaches us that Yaakov Avinu together with the twelve shevatim are the chariot for HKB”H—the “merkavah”—referred to as אה”ד. The letter “chet,” with a gematria of eight, represents the eight sons of the matriarchs, Rachel and Leah. The letter “dalet,” with a gematria of four, represents the four sons of the maidservants, Bilhah and Zilpah. Yaakov himself, their father, who imparted his kedushah to them is represented by the letter “aleph.” Altogether, they form the word אה”ד. Hence, when Yaakov asked his sons if perchance, chas v’shalom, any of them were unworthy to be

part of the holy chariot, they replied in unison: “שמע ישראל ה' אלקינו ה' אחד—just as there is only אה”ד (One) in your heart, so, too, there is only אה”ד (One) in our heart.

The Bris Kehunas Olam proceeds to explain the significance of being HKB”H’s chariot. As we know, the holy name Havaya has twelve permutations, which control the twelve months of the year. HKB”H exists above them all. This is the inherent allusion in the name אה”ד. HKB”H, the Almighty, is represented by the letter “aleph”; he encompasses all of the twelve permutations of the name Havaya, represented by the letters אה”ד (8+4). In similar fashion, Yaakov and the twelve shevatim are the chariot for HKB”H. Yaakov Avinu stands above the twelve shevatim, who correspond to the twelve permutations of the blessed name Havaya.

With this introduction, he interprets the words “ארמי אוֹבֵד” “ארמי אוֹבֵד” Lavan sought to destroy the combination of letters that form the word אב”י—the ‘א and the ‘י. He sought to kill Yaakov, the root of kedushah. However, seeing as Yaakov is part of HKB”H’s chariot, represented by the letter “aleph” of אה”ד, HKB”H admonished Lavan HaArami (ibid. 31, 29): “השמר לך—beware of speaking with Yaakov either good or bad.

The Aramaic Word for אה”ד Is ח”ד

Then the Bris Kehunas Olam adds a fascinating tidbit. How did Lavan HaArami seek to destroy Yaakov, who is represented by the word אב”י—the ‘א above the ‘י—the **one** above the **twelve**? Because in Aramaic, the word for **one** is “חד”, without the “aleph.” In other words, Lavan HaArami sought to destroy Yaakov, the “aleph” of אה”ד. This concludes his sacred words.

With this understanding, let us interpret the passuk: “ארמי אוֹבֵד אבי וירד מצרימה” Lavan HaArami sought to destroy the combination אב”י—Yaakov, the “aleph,” the guiding force above the twelve shevatim. Not only did he not succeed, but Yaakov went down to Mitzrayim with the twelve shevatim—to solidify the incredible union of אב”י. As it is written (Shemos 1, 1): “ואלה שמות בני ישראל הבאים מצרימה את—these are the names of the sons of Yisrael who came to Mitzrayim; with Yaakov, each man and his household came. They expound in the Midrash (S.R. 1, 4): “את יעקב, כל אלה מכוחו של יעקב שסיגל מצוות ומעשים טובים וזכה: “With Yaakov”: All of these

came from the virtue of Yaakov who had accumulated mitzvos and good deeds and merited establishing twelve shevatim—“each man and his household came.”

Based on the insight of the Bris Kehunas Olam, we can explain a precious gem presented in the sefer Butzina D’Nehora in the name of the great Rabbi Baruch of Medzhybizh, zy”a. He explains the statement in the Zohar hakadosh (Terumah 135a) that we recite on Friday nights: **”רזא דשבת איהי שבת דאתאחדת ברזא דאחד—the mystery of Shabbas is that on Shabbas everything is united in the mystery of Oneness.** In the translation of the Targum Onkelos of Krias Shema, he omits the letter **“aleph”** from the word **אח”ד** and translates it as **”חד”**. To make amends, he adds the letter **“aleph”** to the word **”שבת”** and translates it as **”שבתא”**. Thus, we can interpret this statement as follows: **”רזא דשבת איהי שבת דאתאחדת ברזא דאחד—by means of Shabbas, we correct the missing letter “aleph” of the word אח”ד.**

In truth, at first glance, this interpretation appears enigmatic. After all, what is the connection between Shabbas and the **אח”ד** of Krias Shema? And how does Shabbas correct the **“aleph”** the Targum Onkelos omitted from the word **אח”ד**? To shed some light on the matter, let us recall that we have learned in the Gemara (Shabbas 118a) that Shabbas Kodesh is the heritage of Yaakov.

Now, Onkelos, the proselyte, translated the Torah into Aramaic. In Aramaic, the word **”אחד”** (one) is **”חד”** without an **“aleph.”** As we explained above, Lavan HaArami sought to uproot everything by employing Aramaic to eliminate the **“aleph”** of **אח”ד** corresponding to Yaakov Avinu. Therefore, Onkelos cleverly added the missing **“aleph”** of **אח”ד** to the word **שב”ת**, making it **שב”תא**. This teaches us that in the merit of observing Shabbas, the heritage of Yaakov Avinu, we are able to attach ourselves to the Oneness of Hashem and restore the **“aleph”** of **אח”ד**. In the words of the Zohar hakadosh: **”רזא דשבת איהי שבת דאתאחד ברזא דאחד”**.



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