

Parashat Ki Tavo
Rabbi David Silverberg

Parashat Ki-Tavo begins by discussing the *mitzva* of *bikkurim*, which requires a farmer to bring his first fruits each year to Jerusalem as a gift to the officiating *kohen*. Among the unique features of this *mitzva*, as the Torah describes, is the *mikra bikkurim* declaration which the farmer must recite as part of the *bikkurim* ceremony. This declaration, which the Torah dictates in our *parasha* (26:5-10), briefly recounts the story of the Exodus, from the time of Yaakov until *Benei Yisrael*'s departure from Egypt, and then tells of the nation's entry into the land.

Maimonides introduces this obligation in *Mishneh Torah* (Hilkhos Bikkurim 3:10) by writing, "There is an affirmative command to confess in the Temple over the *bikkurim*" ("Mitzvat aseil le-hitvadot be-Midkash al ha-bikkurim..."). Curiously, Maimonides defines this declaration as a *viduy*, a "confession." This term is familiar to us from two other contexts, most obviously the *mitzva* of *teshuva*, which Maimonides, in the beginning of Hilkhos Teshuva, defines as essentially an obligation to verbally confess. Additionally, the Sages employed the term *viduy* also in reference to the second *mitzva* presented in Parashat Ki-Tavo, a *halakha* known as *viduy ma'aser*. This obligation requires a farmer to pronounce a declaration every three years affirming his compliance with the laws of *terumot* and *ma'aserot* (the required tithes and other gifts from his agricultural yield). Maimonides, interestingly enough, applies the term *viduy* also to *mikra bikkurim*.

Many writers have addressed the question as to how the concept of "confession" relates to *viduy ma'aser*, in which a farmer announces that he has faithfully observed all the laws applying to his agricultural produce. In fact, in this pronouncement the farmer goes so far as to say, "I have heeded the voice of the Lord my God; I have done in accordance with all You commanded me" (26:14). Such a declaration hardly seems to resemble confession, the sincere, remorseful admission of guilt. Apparently, the term *viduy* must be understood as a more general reference to soul-searching and introspection, and not specifically to confession of sin. A person who "takes stock" of his spiritual achievement and concludes that "I have done in accordance with all You commanded me" has also performed *viduy*, insofar as he has carefully and honestly examined himself and his conduct.

Still, the question remains as to why Maimonides applied this term to *mikra bikkurim*. In what sense is this succinct historical survey a "confession"?

The answer, perhaps, is that *mikra bikkurim* constitutes *viduy* on the national level. The farmer is bidden to "take stock" of the general state of *Am Yisrael*, which he does by recalling our nation's humble beginnings and miraculous emergence on the stage of history. Upon seeing his new fruit each year, one must recognize the great miracle that these fruits embody, the miracle of *Am Yisrael*'s residence and sovereignty in its land. He "confesses" that we, as a people, have much for which to give thanks to God, having arisen from the depths of suffering and persecution and ultimately establishing sovereignty and a prosperous country in our homeland.

Thus, while *viduy ma'aser* “takes stock” of one’s individual status, and allows him to take pride in his observance, *mikra bikkurim* is a *viduy* in terms of *Am Yisrael*’s state as a nation. It requires the individual to look beyond his personal condition and even the current travails of *Am Yisrael*, and recognize how far our nation has come, and how enormous a debt of gratitude we owe the Almighty.