

# Ki Tavo: Mikra Bikurim

- Nisson Shulman.

The declaration at the end of the cycle of tithes, made at each third year, is appropriate for this season of Selichot and Holidays. Lo achalti beoni... I did not approach Judaism through sadness and bereavement, kaddish and yahrzeit. It is a religion of joy. Lo biarti mimenu betame, Whatever the differences of opinions between groups of Jews, I have never used impure methods to state my view and carry out my political opinion. Lo natati mimenu lamet... My Judaism is not a relic of the past, not merely a tribute to the past history and heroism, but especially of the future, of a renewal of life we shall create.

1. Tithes in rotation:

When our people lived in Israel in times long ago, we gave tithes in a certain rotation.... 1-2, 1-2, 1-3... At the end of the third year there was a special declaration that each Jew was required to make, that he had performed the commandment of tithes according to all its details.

2. One passage of this declaration stands out, because it suggests to me certain thoughts that are particularly appropriate to this time of year. Lo achalti beoni mimenu; lo biarti mimenu betame; velo natati mimenu lamet.

a. Of course, the simple clear meaning is that ... But I suggest that there are three lessons to be learned that bear on our appreciation of Judaism and apply to our thoughts and deeds as Jews, everywhere.

3. Lo achalti beoni mimenu. I am not committed to Judaism through sadness and bereavement alone. To me, Judaism is not a faith of tzarot; kaddish and yahrzeit is not the main part of Judaism, important as it is by which to remember our beloved parents. To me Judaism is a joyous faith and requires optimism and a hopeful approach to life. Here we are in the month of Elul. Next week we begin Selichot. It is a difficult month. In it we experience the Days of Judgement, a Fast of Atonement, a Sabbath of Penitence, in fact Ten Days of teshuva. It is not easy. It is indeed a chore. But we must not be tempted to think that it is a sad a somber chore. Lo achalti beoni mimenu! We must find joy in Jewish life, in the spirit of the statement of Rabbi Akiva, ashrechem yisrael, lifne mi umi metaher etchem,... Even in sad times, such as when Ezra and Nehemia.... straying people, teshuva en masse, read Torah publicly, began to weep, so Ezra declared. "This is not a sad day. It is a day for feasting and drinking; a day of joy, because joy in God's service is your greatest strength, Ki hedvat Hashem hi mauzchem.

4. Second: Lo biarti mimenu betame. I have not eliminated it from my possession in an impure manner. If this past year has had a truly tragic event in Jewish life, apart from the tragic loss of life through terrorists, it is the antagonisms that have been engendered an exacerbated in the dati anti-dati struggles in Israel. Now, many of these people have pure motives. I make no judgment now about their politics or their goals or their convictions. That is for another time. There is a commandment to eliminate evil from our midst, and if you believe something is evil, it surely should be eliminated from the Jewish community. But not by impure means! Not by methods which are tame! Not by violence, not by desecrating God's Holy Name! Lo biarti mimenu betame!

5. Third, *Lo natati mimenu lamet*. I have not considered my Judaism only a relic of the past, something for the dead. I do not live only in the past, considering my Jewish identity only applicable to things that have been long gone and moldering. When I go to the Kotel, what do I see? Do I see, looking off to the right, only archeological digs, or to the left, tunnels that reveal great stones of ancient Temple wall, and think of glory that was past? Looking ahead at the wall, do I see only that which refers to ancient glory? This is a tribute to the dead, but it is not yet life. I see rather the Temple that shall be; I see the present heroism with which it was captured. I see the hopes expressed in the prayers, and the hopefulness in the future building of Israeli society; I see the Sanhedrin of old, and the Torah of the present and the promise of the future all blended together, and I see the unfolding of Zion's redemption step by step as prophesied and promised in scripture. And I see the resolve and resolution that must be at the very soul of everyone who believes in *Eretz Yisrael al pi Torat Yisrael* as the key to Jewish life and survival and a great and glorious future! I do not see graves alone, except insofar as those in them are the forerunners of the vibrant life of today and the examples after whom we shall model our life in the future! *Lo natati mimenu lamet!* I have not relegated Judaism into a creed of the dead! Yes, we say *Hadesh yamenu kekedem!* We pray for strength and faith as of days of old; but strength and faith to serve God today! And that is the third lesson of the passage: *Lo achalti beoni mimenu: lo biarti mimenu betame; velo natati mimenu lamet.*