

## CURRENT TALMUD PASSAGE

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BH

### CELEBRATING ISRAEL'S BEAUTY AND RICHNESS

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The holiday of Shavuot is upon us. Having counted 7x7 days we come to Mount Sinai. In the days when the Temple stood, this was the festival of the first fruits. A wonderful parade with music and baskets decorated all over with different kinds of produce came to the Temple. (Think of those huge jars of artistically placed vegetables you see in some Italian restaurants as a sort of form for these baskets.)

When your turn came, you would set down your basket before the priest and recite Deuteronomy 26:1-11. The greatness of the Land of Israel is described earlier in Deuteronomy:

For the Lord your God is bringing you into a good land,  
a land of brooks of water,  
of fountains  
and depths,  
springing forth in valleys  
and hills.  
A land of wheat  
and barley  
and vines  
and fig trees  
and pomegranates  
a land of olive trees  
and honey...a land where you will lack nothing; a land whose rocks are iron and from whose hills you can mine copper and you will eat and be satisfied and bless the name of God your Lord for the good land which He gave to you. (Deuteronomy 8:7-10)

Notice that the text here first reassures the community that its most crucial resource, water, will be provided by God, not in the usual way (rain) but it shall almost magically appear up out of the ground. With good soil and a constant water supply, we will be able to cultivate crops not only for one season (e.g., wheat) but we will also be able to plant trees meant to stand for centuries (e.g., olive trees). Finally, God has installed within the innarable parts of the land resources to help us meet our needs.

#### Discussion Questions:

1. Think of as many kinds of categories of water as you can (e.g., cave water, ice, rain, sleet, typhoon, snow). God specifically promises here to bring water up from the ground. What is the significance of this?
2. T. Bikkurim 2:8 explains how the basket is to look, going from bottom to top: a layer of barley, then wheat, then olives, then dates, then pomegranates, then figs, then grapeclusters to decorate. Try arranging these items in this order at home. Does it give the holiday extra significance?
3. The mosaic floor of the Sepphoris mosaic shows this first-fruit basket decorated with two pigeons which are not even mentioned until they show up in the Yerushalmi (Y. Bikkurim 3:4, 65d). (Tosefta is from 220 C.E., Yerushalmi is from about 400 C.E. The mosaic floor is from the 5th-7th centuries.) This would appear to affirm

that Judaism kept changing and, therefore, stayed alive. Can you think of other instances ways in which the holiday of Shavuot has been "re-formed"?