A First Fruits Pilgrimage Through Prospect Park
with Rabbi Jason Gitlin

Source Sheet by Rabbi Jason Gitlin

Exodus 23:14-17
(14) Three times a year you shall hold a festival for Me: (15) You shall observe the Feast of Unleavened Bread—eating unleavened bread for seven days as I have commanded you—at the set time in the month of Abib, for in it you went forth from Egypt; and none shall appear before Me empty-handed; (16) and the Feast of the Harvest, of the first fruits of your work, of what you sow in the field; and the Feast of Ingathering at the end of the year, when you gather in the results of your work from the field. (17) Three times a year all your males shall appear before the Sovereign, the LORD.

Deuteronomy 26:1-2
(1) When you enter the land that the LORD your God is giving you as a heritage, and you possess it and settle in it, (2) you shall take some of every first fruit of the soil, which you harvest from the land that the LORD your God is giving you, put it in a basket and go to the place where the LORD your God will choose to establish His name.

Rashi on Deuteronomy 26:2:1

решי על דבוריים צמות:א'
Deuteronomy 8:7-10

(7) For the LORD your God is bringing you into a good land, a land with streams and springs and fountains issuing from plain and hill; (8) a land of wheat and barley, of vines, figs, and pomegranates, a land of olive trees and honey; (9) a land where you may eat food without stint, where you will lack nothing; a land whose rocks are iron and from whose hills you can mine copper. (10) When you have eaten your fill, give thanks to the LORD your God for the good land which He has given you.

Sforno on Deuteronomy 26:2

(8) The word ראשית is not understood as “first.” The term ראשית used in this sense in Amos 6:6 means “the ones known as the choicest of the nations.” These “choicest” fruit are the seven types of produce for which the Land of Israel is famous, and this is why we have been commanded already in Exodus
23,19 to offer samples of these in the Temple. The gift known as הבכורים is not literally the first ripe produce of each of these seven species, but the ones that grow on the best soil the farmer has so that it is truly also his choicest. The seven categories of produce have been enumerated in Deut. 8:8-9.

**Bava Batra 81a**
The Gemara asks: But isn't it written: “Which you shall bring in from your land” (Deuteronomy 26:2)? This verse indicates that the fruit must be the produce of your land, not land that belongs to another. The Gemara answers: That verse serves to exclude land that is outside of Eretz Yisrael, which is not the land of the Jewish people. It does not exclude land that does not belong to that specific individual.

**Bikkurim Celebrations in Modern Israel, from Learning with the National Library of Israel**
The early settlements in modern Israel transformed the traditional Bikkurim ceremony into a secular agricultural celebration – first fruit ceremonies to rejoice the end of the harvest festival (another term for Shavuot). The first fruits in the kibbutzim, in contrast to the time of the Temple, are not only the seven species but all kinds of fruits, vegetables, livestock, and even the babies born in the past year. The ceremonies feature colourful performances of songs and dances and processions of decorated agricultural tools and machinery, farm produce, and young children.

**Mishnah Bikkurim 3:1**
(1) How does one set aside bikkurim? A man goes down into his field, he sees a fig that ripened, or a cluster of grapes that ripened, or a pomegranate that ripened, he ties a reed-rope around it and says: “Let these be bikkurim.” Rabbi Shimon says: even so, he must again designate them as bikkurim after they have been plucked from the soil.
The Seven Species

The Kabbalist (Jewish mystic) Rabbi Isaac Luria attributed the spiritual energies of each fruit to one of the seven lower sefirot (spiritual emanations) that we count during each week of the Omer. The Seven Species BY REBBETZIN CHANA B SIEGELBAUM

Wheat corresponds to chesed (kindness), first of the 7 lower sefirot.

**Psalms 147:14**

(14) God endows your realm with well-being, and satisfies you with choice wheat.

(Heb. חיטה hittah) required care as a crop and wheat products were frequently considered food for the wealthy. Like barley, wheat is sown at the beginning of winter but develops more slowly and ripens about 2 months after the barley crop. Hence, after the counting of the barley Omer for 7 weeks during and following Passover, the first fruits of the wheat crop are offered around the time of Shavuot. Wheat, Encyclopaedia Judaica (2nd ed.) (Jehuda Feliks), Flora, Anchor Bible Dictionary (Irene Jacob & Walter Jacob), What Did the Ancient Israelites Eat? (Nathan MacDonald) at 19-21.

Barley corresponds to gevura (restraint)

Its characteristic is contraction, reduction, and setting boundaries.

**Shabbat 140b:9**


https://www.sefaria.org/sheets/321403?editor=1
And Rav Ḥisda also said: One who is able to eat barley bread and nevertheless eats wheat bread violates the prohibition against wanton destruction. One who wastes resources is comparable to one who destroys items of value. And Rav Pappa said: One who is able to drink beer and nevertheless drinks wine violates the prohibition against wanton destruction. The Gemara comments: And this is not a correct matter, as the prohibition against destruction of one’s body takes precedence…

Of the cereals, Barley (Heb. שָׁנַת, še’orab) ripens first and rabbinic tradition maintains the Omer was comprised of barley (Men. 84b) since barley ripened during the Passover season. Barley bread and porridge was often thought of as the food of the poor or of those living in marginal agricultural areas. Barley was also used to make beer and as animal fodder. Encyclopedia Judaica (2nd ed.)(Jehuda Feliks), Flora, Anchor Bible Dictionary (Irene Jacob & Walter Jacob); What Did the Ancient Israelites Eat? (Nathan MacDonald) at 19-21.

Grapes correspond to tiferet (beauty).

balance between different and sometimes contrary components

Grapes (Heb. עֵנָב, anav) the fruit of the grape vine, were consumed fresh or dried into raisins or currents. Grapes were also pressed to produce juice that was used to make wine or vinegar. Wine was an important drink in the ancient world since it could be stored over long periods and carried by travelers over extended distances without spoilage. Where potable water could not be found, wine often served as a substitute for water. As a result of its multiple uses, vines, along with olives, were second only to cereals in their agricultural importance. In the Hebrew Bible, the vine is often used as a metaphor for Israel and a symbol of peace and prosperity. Vine, Encyclopedia Judaica (2nd ed.)(Jehuda Feliks), Flora, Anchor Bible Dictionary (Irene Jacob & Walter Jacob)

Figs correspond to netzach (endurance)
**Michah 4:1-4**

In the days to come, The Mount of the LORD’s House shall stand Firm above the mountains; And it shall tower above the hills. The peoples shall gaze on it with joy, And the many nations shall go and shall say: “Come, Let us go up to the Mount of the LORD, To the House of the God of Jacob; That He may instruct us in His ways, And that we may walk in His paths.” For instruction shall come forth from Zion, The word of the LORD from Jerusalem. Thus He will judge among the many peoples, And arbitrate for the multitude of nations, However distant; And they shall beat their swords into plowshares And their spears into pruning hooks. Nation shall not take up Sword against nation; They shall never again know war; **But every man shall sit under his grapevine or fig tree With no one to disturb him.** For it was the LORD of Hosts who spoke.

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Pomegranate corresponds to *bod*, majesty and glory, and have crowns.

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Mishneh Torah, Tefillin, Mezuzah and the Torah Scroll 10:4

וכֶּלּוּ גָּדוֹל וְהָהָנָב וַחֲנִיתֵיהֶם לִקְנוֹת אוֹתָן מָכַר כֵּּן אִם לְחָל לְהוֹצִיאָן וְאָסֻר הֵן קְדֻשָּׁה תַּשְׁמִישֵׁי לְנוֹי תּוֹרָה לְסֵפֶר שֶׁעוֹשִׂין בָּהֶן וְכַיּוֹצֵא וְזָהָב כֶּסֶף רִמּוֹנֵי וְכֵּּן חֻמָּשׁ

...Golden and silver pomegranates and other such ornaments, made for the embellishment of a scroll of the law are subsidiaries of that which is sacred; and it is forbidden to part with them to be used for secular purposes, unless they were sold with the intention to purchase with their proceeds a scroll of the law or a book of the Pentateuch.

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Olives corresponds to *yesod* (foundation)
An evergreen tree, the olive tree also produces shoots that sprout from its roots and ensure its continuity if the main trunk dies or is cut down. For this reason, the olive tree also symbolizes longevity. Due to its great longevity, an olive tree can produce fruit for many centuries. The olive symbolizes continuity and the transmission of life and knowledge from one generation to another. *Encyclopedia Judaica* (2nd ed.) (Jehuda Feliks), *Flora, Anchor Bible Dictionary* (Irene Jacob & Walter Jacob).

Deuteronomy 24:20
(20) When you beat down the fruit of your olive trees, do not go over them again; that shall go to the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow.

Psalms 52:10
(10) But I am like a thriving olive tree in God’s house; I trust in the faithfulness of God forever and ever.

Psalms 128:3
(3) Your wife shall be like a fruitful vine within your house; your sons, like olive saplings around your table.

**Dates Honey correspond to malchut (kingdom)**

The quality that links the Eternal Sovereign to the “real” world. *Malkhut* is perhaps more familiarly known as the *Shekhinah*, the Divine Presence, God’s immanent aspect, the way in which we experience the Divine.

**Mishnah Bikkurim 3:3**
(3) Those who lived near [Jerusalem] would bring fresh figs and grapes, while those who lived far away would bring dried figs and raisins. An ox would go in front of them, his horns bedecked with gold and with an olive-crown on its head. The
flute would play before them until they would draw close to Jerusalem. When they drew close to Jerusalem they would send messengers in advance, and they would adorn their bikkurim. The governors and chiefs and treasurers [of the Temple] would go out to greet them, and according to the rank of the entrants they would go forth. All the skilled artisans of Jerusalem would stand up before them and greet them saying, “Our brothers, men of such and such a place, we welcome you in peace.”

Mishneh Torah, First Fruits and other Gifts to Priests Outside the Sanctuary 3:11

(11) Originally, anyone who could recite the prescribed biblical passage recited it; and if anyone could not recite it, he was assisted in reciting it. But when those illiterates refrained from bringing their first fruits, that they might not be put to shame, it was ordained by the court that both those that knew and those that did not know should be made to repeat the words [after the priest].

Deuteronomy 26:3-11

(3) You shall go to the priest in charge at that time and say to him, “I acknowledge this day before the LORD your God that I have entered the land that the LORD swore to our fathers to assign us.” (4) The priest shall take the basket from your hand and set it down in front of the altar of the LORD your God. (5) You shall then recite as follows before the LORD your God: “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. (6) The Egyptians dealt harshly with us and oppressed us; they imposed heavy labor upon us. (7) 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. (8) The LORD freed us from Egypt by a mighty
hand, by an outstretched arm and awesome power, and by signs and portents. (9) He brought us to this place and gave us this land, a land flowing with milk and honey. (10) Wherefore I now bring the first fruits of the soil which You, O LORD, have given me.” You shall leave it before the LORD your God and bow low before the LORD your God. (11) And you shall enjoy, together with the Levite and the stranger in your midst, all the bounty that the LORD your God has bestowed upon you and your household.