

B"H

Parshat Ekev

The Seven Species

from Harav Yitzchak Ginsburgh

For Havayah your God brings you into a good land, a land of water courses, of fountains and depths that spring out of valleys and hills; a land of wheat, and barley, and vines, and fig trees, and pomegranates; a land of olive oil, and honey.¹

might גְּבוּרָה
barley

loving-kindness חֶסֶד
wheat

beauty תְּפִאֲרָה
grape

acknowledgment הוֹד
pomegranate

victory נִצָּח
fig

foundation יְסוּד
olive

kingdom מְלִכּוּת
date palm

The seven species are the types of fruit the Land of Israel is blessed with, as described in these verses. When eating a variety of fruit, these species take precedence over others (such as oranges or apples) and therefore we recite the blessing for fruit on them. On bread prepared from wheat or barley (the first two of the seven species) we recite the special blessing for bread. On pastries made from wheat or barley we recite the special blessing for pastries and on wine prepared from grapes (the third species) we recite the special blessing for wine. After eating from these types of fruit, we also recite a special blessing (and after a meal with bread, the full four blessings of the grace after a meal).



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Let us discuss the correspondence found in this model. This is one of the most beautiful such models in the Torah because its seven elements correspond in order to the seven lower *sefirot*.

Wheat and Barley

Wheat and barley usually make up the staples of our diet. In *Perek Shirah* (usually translated as the *Song of Creation*), an anthology documenting the particular verse sung by various elements of creation in praise of the Creator, wheat and barley sing verses that relate to prayer. Wheat sings the verse, “A song of ascent: From the depths I have called upon You, God.”² Barley sings the verse, “A prayer for the destitute: Before God he pours his words.”³ These two verses suggest that wheat and barley correspond to the staple of the spiritual dimension of our lives: prayer.

Traditionally, barley was considered the food of the poor and needy, while wheat was reserved for the wealthy. Likewise, barley sings of the prayer of the impoverished individual who cries out to God to fulfill his physical needs, while wheat corresponds to the prayer of the wealthy individual who is only truly able to pray when he has reached the greatest depths of his heart, when he has touched the root of his spiritual being.

The existential experience of the wealthy is one of God’s loving-kindness, of abundance; that all of reality is indeed meant to serve their every need. The individual who struggles through life has an existential experience of God’s might—translating into the feeling that every penny counts. Where loving-kindness represents infinite abundance and possibility, might represents a sense of appreciation for the forces of separation and division in reality, forces that break it up into its smallest particles.

Grape

The **grapes of the vine** sing the verse, “So says God: As wine is found in the cluster [of grapes] and one says, ‘Destroy it not, for a blessing is in it,’ so will I do for My servants’ sake; I will not destroy them all.”⁴ The word for “grapevine” (גִּפְתֵּן) in Hebrew stems from the same root as the word for “body” (גוף). In the introduction to *Tikunei Zohar*, the *sefirah* of beauty is described as “the body” (תפארת גופא).

From the verse it sings, it is clear that the grapevine calls upon us to look at the content and not just the packaging. The internal harbors a promise for the future that cannot always be seen from the outside. Likewise, in the future, the soul will be nourished by the body; i.e., our inner self, the soul, will be nourished by our outer self, the body. The inner soul of beauty is the *sefirah* of knowledge, properly expressed when

we recognize the importance of both the message and the media it is being transmitted through.

Fig

The **fig** sings the verse, “He who guards the fig shall eat its fruit.”⁵ The traditional commentaries explain that the fig needs to be carefully watched. Once it is ripe, it will quickly spoil if not picked immediately from the tree. The *sefirah* of victory, which is also translated as eternity, is the one most related to time and therefore fits best with the temporal urgency found in the fig.

The fig is also the first fruit mentioned explicitly in the Torah. According to Rashi, the forbidden fruit of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil was the fig. After having sinned, Adam and Eve, instead of living forever, were punished to die (the opposite of the *sefirah* of victory/eternity). Realizing that they were naked, they prepared clothing from fig leaves (from the very tree of their sin). This suggests that the fig is connected with the experience of the *ba'al teshuvah*, the penitent who wishes to mend his relationship with the Almighty. Indeed, the *ba'al teshuvah* experiences a sense of urgency about the Divine commandments and prohibitions that is meant to offset his or her earlier proclivity to ignore them.

The Hebrew word for “excuse”⁶ (תַּאֲנִיָּה) stems from the same root as “fig” (תַּאֲנִיָּה). The true *ba'al teshuvah* eventually comes to the realization that his previous lifestyle, when still ignorant of God and the commandments, was not a mistake. Rather it was an excuse used by the Almighty to bring him to experience this urgency in his Divine service.

Pomegranate

The verse sung by the **pomegranate** is “Your cheekbones are like a piece of the pomegranate from between your braids.”⁷ Based on the grammatical similarity between “cheekbone” (רִקְקָה) and “empty individuals” (רִיקְנִים) the sages state⁸ that even those Jews who seem void [of performing the commandments] are filled with good deeds like a pomegranate is full of seeds (the delicious fruit of the pomegranate).

To understand that even the void is full of good requires us to realize that God and His goodness are truly universal and omnipresent. There is no place void of God’s Presence and even that which for the time being seems empty is truly filled with God’s infinite light. This is the cornerstone of the Ba’al Shem Tov’s interpretation of the Arizal’s doctrine of the contraction. The pomegranate thus represents the need to acknowledge God’s omnipresence and corresponds to the *sefirah* of acknowledgment.

Olive

In *Perek Shirah*, the **olive** tree does not have a specific song. Rather, it is included in the general song sung by the trees of the field, “Then, the trees of the forest will sing before God who has come to judge the earth.”⁹ Thus, the olive includes the song of all the trees, like the *sefirah* of foundation includes all the *sefirot* above it. In fact, the word “foundation” (יסוד) is equal to the two words “for all” (בְּכָל), the opening words of its description, “For all in the heavens and the earth.”¹⁰

The sages describe olives as causing memory loss, but olive oil as strengthening memory. In the verse describing the seven species, the olive is described with both words “olive oil” (זַיִת שֶׁמֶן), but because of the particular grammatical structure, the wording suggests that the oil, which promotes memory is derived from the fruit, which causes forgetfulness. Thus, the message hinted at is that memory follows forgetfulness. What does this mean? The olive’s taste is bitter, thus it is the bitterness of mundane life that it is blessed with making us forget. By forgetting the bitterness of the past, we open ourselves to remembering it in a positive light. This is a particularly important ingredient in retelling history, especially the history of the Jewish people.

The Torah is likened to olive oil. It is the study of Torah, the Divine light given to us from above, that grants us the ability to “judge the earth,”¹¹ to retell history in a positive manner. When the oil of the Torah judges/rectifies the entire earth, representing mundane wisdom (such as science), then indeed all the trees of the field will sing before God.

Date Palm

The date palm sings the verse, “The *tzadik* will blossom like a date palm, like the cedar of the Lebanon it shall grow.”¹² The final letters of the words, “the *tzadik* will blossom like a date palm” (צַדִּיק כְּתַמָּר יִפְרֹחַ) spell Korach (קֹרַח), the name of the Levite that contested Moshe Rabbeinu’s leadership. Thus, the date palm represents a rectified form of Korach’s arguments against Moshe’s leadership. Korach claimed that “the entire congregation is holy.” Indeed, in the future, we will see that “Your entire people are *tzadikim*.”

While the individual holiness of the *tzadik* corresponds to the *sefirah* of foundation, the collective holiness of the entire congregation of Israel corresponds to the *sefirah* of kingdom. Kingdom is described as the receptacle able to contain the light emanating from foundation. Likewise, every Jew is like a vessel shining with the holiness of the leader of the generation, considered the extension of Moshe Rabbeinu himself. When the *tzadik*’s light has been properly integrated into his generation’s Jewish people, we merit

to inherit the Land of Israel, as in the conclusion of the verse quoted above, "Your entire people are *tzadikim*, they will forever inherit the land."¹³

¹. Deuteronomy 8:7-8.

². Psalms 130:1.

³. Ibid. 102:1.

⁴. Isaiah 65:8.

⁵. Proverbs 27:18.

⁶. See Judges 14:4 and *Rashi* there.

⁷. Song of Songs 4:3 and 6:7.

⁸. *Eiruv* 19a.

⁹. 1 Chronicles 16:33.

¹⁰. Ibid. 29:11.

¹¹. The earth corresponds to the *sefirah* of kingdom. Thus, the olive, corresponding to foundation judges the earth corresponding to kingdom.

¹². Psalms 92:13.

¹³. Isaiah 60:21.