

Mikeitz- Yaakov' s Mincha, Zimras Haaretz

By Rabbi Eliyahu Kirsh

In Bereishis 43:11 we read of the gift that Yaakov sent to Mitzrayim, hoping to pacify whom he believed was only the viceroy but not his own son. The gift consisted of *zimras haaretz*, the praise of the land. In this same verse we are told that the gift consisted of *tzari*, honey, *nechos*, *lot*, *botnim* and *shekaidim*. But what are the identities of these items and why were they significant?

Tzari is balm, the first of the eleven spices used in the incense brought in the Bais Hamikdash. As such, it was clearly an extraordinary spice. This *tzari* came from *ktaf* balsam trees which grow abundantly in the Gilad area. Besides being a spice it was also used frequently as a soothing salve in the ancient Middle East

Rashi says *nechos* is wax. In ancient times waxes were made from the gummy resins of certain trees. Onkolos also translates *nachos* as She-af which also suggests something gummy or waxy, as Rashi states in Parshas Vayeshev [Bereishis 37:25] when the Torah describes the caravan that took Yosef to Mitzrayim. Rashi also states over there that *nechos* can mean a bundle of spices in general.

Midrash Rabbah says that *lot* is a pale, yellowish resin of the mastic tree. In general these gummy resins had very pleasant and strong scents and were used as perfumes as well as medicines. [Interestingly, the modern Hebrew word for chewing gum is mastic.] So it is understandable why they were so highly prized.

Rashi says he does not know what *botnim* are but he saw in the dictionary of Machir Ben Yehuda that *botnim* are *pistaches* he personally believes are peaches. Gil Marks, a regular writer for Emunah Magazine in his article on nut trees in the Winter 2009 issue, comments that Rashi came to this conclusion because he probably never tasted pistachio nuts. There is a similarity to peaches in that the pistachio nut when young is encased in a green leathery case which looks like an unripe peach. However, Marks comments that the Middle-Eastern Jews had been eating pistachio nuts from the beginning of time and right away knew that this was the proper translation for *botnim*. He then writes that the pistachio nut tree is a deciduous nut tree that originated in Persia and was later cultivated throughout the Middle East. These trees are known to live

for seven hundred years and can survive in very hot climates with little rain. However, they do not grow in Mitzrayim. Nevertheless, they were prized very much there and were considered to be the snack for the royal harem. As such, it was fitting for Yaakov in his situation to include them in his gift to a high ranking official of Mitzrayim.

Shekeidim are generally agreed to be almonds. The almond tree originated in Central Asia and is one of the earliest cultivated trees in history. In Tanach, we find the almond is a symbol of speed. One example is the time after Korach and his followers were punished and some people were complaining to Moshe that he was too harsh on them. Hashem then told Moshe to have each tribe take a staff write the tribal name on it and leave it in the Kodesh kodashim The staff of the tribe that Hashem had chosen would bring forth flowers. [See Bamidbar 6:26, for the full episode.] The staff of Aharon, whom Hashem had chosen, not only brought flowers but almonds as well. Rashi comments that almonds specifically came forth to show that whoever makes improper claims to kehuna, priesthood, Hashem is quick to punish just as the almond is quick to ripen. We see another example of this in the beginning of Sefer Yirmiyahu. When Yirmiyahu is given his first prophecy[Yirmiyahu 1:11—12], he is asked to describe what he sees, He says he sees a staff from an almond tree. Hashem tells Yirmiyahu he is seeing well as the punishment was, unfortunately, coming quickly.

If these plants were as prized as they were why were they not included among the seven fruits or species that Eretz Yisroel is praised for? The answer to that question is that the seven species are associated with Eretz Yisroel but require much work. The prized items Yaakov sent grow naturally without any cultivation. Hence, they are truly *Zimras Haaretz*.

Special Credit is given to Gil Marks for much of the background to this article.