



Parshat Ki Tavo

For the week ending 16 Elul 5759
27 & 28 August 1999

Overview

When *Bnei Yisrael* dwell in the Land of Israel, its first fruits are to be taken to the Temple and given to the *kohen* in a ceremony expressing recognition that it is Hashem who guides the history of the Jewish People throughout all ages. This passage forms one of the central parts of the Haggadah that we read at the Passover Seder. On the last day of Pesach of the fourth and seventh years of the seven-year *shemitta* cycle, a person must recite a disclosure stating that he has indeed distributed the tithes to the appropriate people in the prescribed manner. With this mitzvah Moshe concludes the commandments that Hashem has told him to give to the Jewish People. Moshe exhorts them to walk in Hashem's ways, because they are set aside as a treasured people to Hashem. When *Bnei Yisrael* cross the Jordan River they are to make a new commitment to the Torah. Huge stones are to be erected and the Torah is to be written on them in the world's seventy primary languages, after which they are to be covered over with a thin layer of plaster. Half the tribes will stand on Mount Gerizim, and half on Mount Eval, and the *levi'im* will stand in a valley between the two mountains. There the *levi'im* will recite 12 commandments and all the people will answer "amen" to the blessings and the curses. Moshe then details the blessings that will be bestowed upon *Bnei Yisrael*. These blessings are both physical and spiritual. However if the Jewish People do not keep the Torah, Moshe details a chilling picture of destruction, resulting in exile and wandering among the nations.

Insights

TO THE LIFEBOAT

"All these curses will come upon you and pursue you and overtake you until you are destroyed, because you will not have listened to the voice of Hashem, your G-d, to observe His commandments and decrees that He commanded you."
(28:45)

I once asked my Rabbi why it was that I alone among my friends had chosen to return to the faith of our fathers. My friends, almost without exception, had married non-Jews and were busy parenting non-Jewish children.

He replied to me with two words in Hebrew, "*zechut avot.*" The merit of the ancestors. "The Torah must have been very dear to someone in your family" he said. "Someone, your grandfather, your grandmother, prayed very hard that they should have Jewish grandchildren."

Imagine you just bought a refrigerator. It turns up in a wooden crate. You take out the fridge and throw away the wood. Imagine you're on a sinking boat with the same refrigerator. You take the wood and throw away the refrigerator. When most of the Jewish World was reaching for a new fridge, someone in my past was hanging on to the wood for dear life.

"It is a tree of life to those who hold on to it, and its supporters are praiseworthy." We say these words from *Mishlei* (Book of Proverbs) every time we put the Torah back into the Holy Ark. Maybe we say them as we are putting the Torah away and out of sight to remind us what the Torah really means to the Jewish People. It is our plank of wood in a stormy sea. It's

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not so much that the Jewish People have kept the Torah, rather the Torah has kept us.

In its description of the Holy Ark which housed the Ten Commandments, the Torah tells us that the Ark's carrying staves are never to be separated from the Ark itself: "*The staves shall remain in the rings of the Ark, they may not be removed from it.*" (Shemot 25:15)

These staves represent the financial supporters of Torah. Just as the staves of the Ark may not be removed, so are the Torah's supporters and benefactors inseparable from Torah scholarship. However, the Ark never really needed the staves because, not only did it bear its own weight, but it would lift up those who were "carrying" it.

When Rabbi Eliezer Gordon, the founder of Telshe Yeshiva, got married, his father-in-law, Rabbi Avraham Yitzchak Neviezer wanted to support him so that he could devote himself to study and become a great Torah scholar.

As Rabbi Gordon's family began to grow, he became increasingly uncomfortable with the feeling that he was burdening his father-in-law, and frequently asked Reb Avraham to allow him to accept one of the numerous rabbinical positions that were then being offered to him. Despite difficult financial times, Reb Avraham refused to let him accept. He insisted that he carry on studying.

Reb Abraham's wife asked her husband how long he intended to support their daughter and son-in-law.

He replied "My dear wife, who knows who is supporting whom..."

When finally Rabbi Gordon was offered the Rabbinate of *Eisheshok*, his father-in-law felt he could not restrain him from accepting such an important post.

The day after the Gordon family left for Eisheshok, Reb Avraham Yitzchak, Rabbi Gordon's father-in-law, passed away. It then became clear who had been supporting whom. The Ark carries those who "carry" it.

"It is a tree of life to those who hold on to it, and its supporters are praiseworthy." Those who support Torah are certainly praiseworthy, and they will be happy with their support, but for the Torah to be a tree of life that will sustain us and our descendants, the Torah must be to us like a tree of life. We must hold on to it like a plank of wood in a shipwreck.

The month of Elul is a time when we re-dedicate ourselves to the Torah and its values. We must hold on to it for dear life. For it is our only unsinkable lifeboat.

Sources: **To The Lifeboat** - Rabbi Zev Leff in Shiurei Bina, Rabbi Moshe Newman

Haftorah: Isaiah 60:1-22

In this, the sixth of the seven Haftoras of Consolation, the Prophet Yeshayahu calls on Jerusalem to arise from the pain of darkness and shadow, and to shine to the world in her full glory. The light of redemption, both physical and spiritual, is being radiated on her. Her long-banished children are returning, and in their wake are the nations of the world who have acknowledged Hashem and that the Jewish People are His emissaries. This redemption, unlike those that have preceded it, will be the final and complete one. "Never again will your sun set, nor your moon be withdrawn, for Hashem shall be unto you an eternal light, and ended will be your days of mourning."

ANNUALS & PERENNIALS

"And your people, they are all righteous, forever shall they inherit the Land, a branch of My planting..." (60:21)

People think that re-incarnation is an Eastern concept. It is. A Middle-Eastern concept. One of Judaism's gift to Eastern thought is reincarnation. If a person doesn't follow the path that G-d indicates in this world, his soul will return until he corrects his character flaws. The above verse alludes to this process: "And your people are all righteous..." The unspoken question arises: "They're all righteous?! I see many people who are a long way from being righteous!" To which the next phrase answers — "a branch of My planting" — those who fail to achieve righteousness will be "re-planted" many times until their good deeds finally come to fruition. Even the least righteous person returns and returns to this world until he eventually becomes virtuous and noble.

Mahram Mizrahi in Mayana shel Torah

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