

5) The Parasha opened with a historic re-cap of our history from Abraham until the arrival in the land. Another summery is found in 29:1-8. What period is missing in 26:5-9, that is supplemented in the latter? Why do you think that it was skipped in the first, but focused on it in the second (especially 29:4-5)?



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The weekly Haftarah Commentary
By Rabbi Mordechai Silverstein, Senior CY Faculty in Talmud and Midrash,
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TORAH SPARKS

Parashat Ki tavo

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Annual (Deuteronomy 26:1-29:8): Etz Hayim p. 1140-1159; Hertz p. 859-873
Triennial (Deuteronomy 26:1-27:10): Etz Hayim p. 1140-1146; Hertz p. 859-864
Haftarah (Isaiah 60:1-22): Etz Hayim p. 1160-1164; Hertz p. 874-877

The Torah's Bargain – for the Children and for the Adults

Yardén Raber, Conservative Yeshiva Talmud Faculty

Parashat Ki Tavo is a prelude to the entry of the People of Israel into the land of Canaan. The public uttering of the blessings to the people while they make their final way to the Promise Land is a theatrical part of this prelude. Members of six tribes stand on one side and bless the people, while on the other side members of the remaining six tribes utter the curses, as the people cross towards their final destination.

This public event is an outstanding example of a theology based on the idea of divine reward and punishment. According to this, the relationship between God and the People of Israel is twofold - those who obey God and fulfill the commandments shall be rewarded, while those who choose not to observe them shall be punished and ultimately destroyed. This theology is widely attested in the book of Deuteronomy and elsewhere, especially in the later Prophets.

However, our modern conceptions of the Divine and our relationship to the latter make it really difficult to connect to that approach. In fact, this is not a modern problem but an old one. Back in the 12th Century Maimonides attempted to reconcile this type of theology with rationality. In his introduction to the so-called “*Perek Chelek*” (the 10th and last chapter of the tractate Sanhedrin) he argues that this theology is not an absolute one, but one aimed at very specific strands of society, such as children and immature people. According to Maimonides these groups are unable to comprehend the superlative value of the commandments. Therefore, they would only obey the law if they believe in the existence of some kind of reward for its fulfillment or punishment for failure to do so.

If this is a theology intended for children, as Maimonides strives to prove, the blessings and curses mentioned in our *parashah* are aimed at people who are going through a stage of childhood and ignorance before entering the Land of Canaan. These blessings and curses attached to the fulfillment (or non-fulfillment) of the commandments are only valid at this specific stage, before the People of Israel reaches its maturity as a nation once it is in the Land of Israel.

We today, unfortunately, live in a world where too many people and nations still act as if they are at the stage of the “children and ignorant,” and do not show a mature approach to law, obligations and the duty to respect others. Given a world where all too often mistakes and tragedies of the past are repeated, parashat Ki Tavo carries a relevant message for today. At a time when the spirit of curse seems to fill the world again, we are called on, like the people who entered Canaan three thousand years ago, not only to reach maturity, but to be a light and blessing of maturity for all the nations, a real *ohr l’goyim* (Isaiah 42:6). In a world with so much darkness, in spiritual eclipse so much of the time, this is our duty. And we should undertake the task with humility and a keen awareness of our own history.

A Vort for Parashat Ki Tavo

Rabbi Daniel Goldfarb, Editor, Torah Sparks

In the First Fruits declaration (Deut 26:6) we say **Vayarehu otanu** *hamitsrim*, the Egyptians **dealt harshly with us** [lit. did us bad], but the commentators note that the Hebrew does not say *lanu* -“bad to us.” They *made us bad*, they eroded the Jewish values of mutual support and communal responsibility, by making us focus on *chomer v’levenim*, bricks and mortar, the material side of life. R’ Yakov-Yehiel Hopsztain, the Fifth Kozhnutzer Rebbe, (Poland, mid 19thC) took the second meaning of the root *Resh-Ayin-Heh* – friendship (the first meaning = bad, evil); the Egyptians *davka* befriended us, brought us close to them and ingratiated us with their culture.

Table Talk

Vered Hollander-Goldfarb, CY Faculty

The Parasha contains descriptions of 2 ceremonies to be carried out in the land that God gives us. It also contains the blessing and curses that could befall us should we fail in our relationship with God while living in the land.

- 1) Once we are in the land, we are obligated to bring the first of the fruits to the place that God chose (26:1-4). What does the person bringing the fruits tell the Kohen? Why do you think that the person should be holding the basket full of fruit while saying this statement?
- 2) The person bringing the fruits recites a passage after his basket is placed by the alter (26:5-10). What is the content of this passage? Why do you think that this was chosen to be said after delivering the first fruits to the dwelling place of God?
- 3) In 27:1-8 we learn of a one-time act that is to be performed once the people enter the land. They are instructed to put up big, plastered stones. What will be written on these stones? What do you think is the significance of this act? (Remember that printing is a new invention, only about 500 years old.) What is the message about life in the land?
- 4) 28:1-14 tells of the blessings that we will get if we observe the Mitzvot. In what 2 spheres are most of these positive outcomes found? V. 9 stands out in the middle of the section (which is constructed loosely in a chiasmic form). How does it differ from the other blessings? How do you understand its meaning?