Kol Rina
An Independent Minyan
Parashat Ki Tavo
August 29, 2026 *** 16 Elul, 5786

Ki Tavo in A Nutshell

https://www.chabad.org/parshah/article_cdo/aid/2504/jewish/Ki-Tavo-in-a-Nutshell.htm

The name of the Parshah, "Ki Tavo," means "when you come," and it is found in Deuteronomy 26:1.

Moses instructs the people of Israel: When you enter the land that G-d is giving to you as your eternal heritage, and you settle it and cultivate it, bring the first-ripened fruits (bikkurim) of your orchard to the Holy Temple, and declare your gratitude for all that G-d has done for you.

Our Parshah also includes the laws of the tithes given to the Levites and to the poor, and detailed instructions on how to proclaim the blessings and the curses on Mount Gerizim and Mount Eival—as discussed in the beginning of the Parshah of Re'eh. Moses reminds the people that they are G-d's chosen people, and that they, in turn, have chosen G-d.

The latter part of Ki Tavo consists of the Tochachah ("Rebuke"). After listing the blessings with which G-d will reward the people when they follow the laws of the Torah, Moses gives a long, harsh account of the bad things—illness, famine, poverty and exile—that shall befall them if they abandon G-d's commandments.

Moses concludes by telling the people that only today, forty years after their birth as a people, have they attained "a heart to know, eyes to see and ears to hear."

Haftarah in a Nutshell: Isaiah 60:1-22
https://www.chabad.org/parshah/article_cdo/aid/555430/jewish/Haftorah-in-a-Nutshell.htm

This week's haftorah is the sixth of a series of seven "Haftarot of Consolation." These seven haftarot commence on the Shabbat following Tisha b'Av and continue until Rosh Hashanah.

In glowing terms the prophet recounts descriptions of what will unfold during the Redemption. Beginning with the resurrection of the dead and the ingathering of the exiles, continuing with the joy and abundance the Jewish people will then experience, as well as the gifts that will be brought to G-d from all of the nations of the world.

Finally, the Jewish nation will no longer be despised and derided, there will no longer be violence nor mourning, and G-d will shine His everlasting light on His people.

FOOD FOR THOUGHT

A Sense of History by Rabbi Jonathan Sacks z”l (5769)
https://rabbisacks.org/covenant-conversation/ki-tavo/a-sense-of-history/

Ki Tavo begins with the ceremony of bringing first-fruits to the Temple. The Mishnah gives a detailed account of what happened:

Those that were near to Jerusalem brought fresh figs and grapes, and those that were far away brought dried figs and raisins. Before them went the ox, its horns overlaid with gold, and with a wreath of olive leaves on its head.

The flute was played before them until they approached Jerusalem. When they were near to Jerusalem, they sent messengers before them and bedecked their first-fruits. The rulers and the prefects and the treasurers of the Temple went forth to meet them. According to the honour due to those that came in, they used to go forth in that order. All the craftsmen in Jerusalem used to rise for them, and greet them, saying, “Brothers, men of such-and-such a place, you are welcome.” Bikkurim 3:3

The flute was played before them until they reached the Temple Mount. When they reached the Temple Mount, even King Agrippa would take his basket on his shoulder and enter in as far as the Temple Court. It was a magnificent ceremony. In historical context, however, its most significant aspect was the declaration that each individual had to make:

“My father was a wandering Aramean, and he went down into Egypt with a few people and lived there and became a great nation, powerful and numerous… Then the Lord brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm, with great terror and with miraculous signs and wonders.” Deut. 26:5-10

This passage is well-known. It became the text expounded as part of the Haggadah on Seder night at the beginning of Pesach. Its familiarity, though, should not blind us to its revolutionary character. Listening to these words, we are in the presence of one of the greatest revolutions in the history of thought.

The ancients saw the gods in nature, never more so than in thinking about the harvest and all that accompanied it. Nature does not change. Natural time is cyclical - the seasons of the year, the revolution of the planets, the cycle of birth, death,

and new life. When the ancients thought about the past, it was not the historical but a mythical/metaphysical/cosmological past – the primeval time-before-time when the world was formed out of the struggle between the elements.

That is precisely what did not happen in Ancient Israel. It might have been otherwise. Had Judaism been a different kind of religion, the people bringing first-fruits might have recited a song of praise to God as the Author of creation and Sustainer of life. We find several such songs in the Book of Psalms:

> Sing to the Lord with thanksgiving; make music to our God on the harp. He covers the sky with clouds; He supplies the earth with rain and makes grass grow on the hills and bread that sustains His heart. Ps. 147:7-8

The significance of the first-fruits declaration is that it is not about nature but about history: a thumbnail sketch of the sequence of events from the days of the patriarchs to the Exodus and then conquest of the Land. Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi gave the best analysis of the intellectual transformation this involved:

> It was Ancient Israel that first assigned a decisive significance to history and thus forged a new world-view … Suddenly, as it were, the crucial encounter between man and the Divine shifted away from the realm of nature and the cosmos to the plane of history, conceived now in terms of Divine challenge and human response … Rituals and festivals in Ancient Israel are themselves no longer primarily repetitions of mythic archetypes meant to annihilate historical time. Where they evoke the past, it is not the primeval but the historical past, in which the great and critical moments of Israel's history were fulfilled … Only in Israel and nowhere else is the injunction to remember felt as a religious imperative to an entire people.

Zachor: Jewish History and Jewish Memory, pp. 8-9

This history was not academic, the province of scholars or a literary elite. It belonged to everyone. The declaration was recited by everyone. Knowing the story of one's people was an essential part of citizenship in the community of faith. Not only that, but it was also said in the first person: "My father … Then the Lord brought us out of Egypt… He brought us to this place". It is this internalisation of history that led the rabbis to say: "In each generation, every person should see himself as if he personally came out of Egypt" (Mishnah Pesachim 10:5). This is history transformed into memory.

To be a Jew is to be part of a story that extends across forty centuries and almost every land on the face of the earth. As Isaiah Berlin put it:

> All Jews who are at all conscious of their identity as Jews are steeped in history. They have longer memories, they are aware of a longer continuity as a community than any other which has survived … Whatever other factors may have entered into the unique amalgam which, if not always Jews themselves, at any rate the rest of the world instantly recognizes as the Jewish People, historical consciousness – sense of continuity with the past – is among the most powerful. Against the Current, p. 252

Despite Judaism's emphasis on the individual, it has a distinctive sense of what an individual is. We are not alone. There is no sense in Judaism of the atomic individual – the self in and for itself – we encounter in Western philosophy from Hobbes onwards. Instead, our identity is bound up horizontally with other individuals: our parents, spouse, children, neighbours, members of the community, fellow

citizens, fellow Jews. We are also joined vertically to those who came before us, whose story we make our own. To be a Jew is to be a link in the chain of the generations, a character in a drama that began long before we were born and will continue long after our death.

Memory is essential to identity – so Judaism insists. We did not come from nowhere; nor does our story end with us. We are leaves on an ancient tree, chapters in a long and still-being-written story, a letter in the scroll of the book of the people of the Book.

There is something momentous about this historical sense. It reflects the fact – itself one of the great themes of the Bible – that it takes time for human beings to learn, to grow, to rise beyond our often dysfunctional and destructive instincts, to reach moral and spiritual maturity and create a society of dignity and generosity. That is why the covenant is extended over time and why – according to the Sages – the only adequate guarantors of the covenant at Mount Sinai were the children yet to be born.

That is as near as we get to immortality on earth: to know that we are the guardians of the hopes of our ancestors, and the trustees of the covenant for the sake of the future. That is what happened in Temple times when people brought their first-fruits to Jerusalem and, instead of celebrating nature, celebrated the history of their people from the days when “My father was a wandering Aramean” to the present. As Moses said in some of his last words to posterity:

Remember the days of old; consider the generations long past. Ask your father and he will tell you, your elders, and they will explain to you. Deut. 32:7

To be a Jew is to know that the history of our people lives on

in us.

Ki Tavo: Who Is Not in the Room? Cantor Sarah Bolts
https://truah.org/resources/sarah-bolts-ki-tavo-moraltorah_2026_/

At the end of chapter 27 of Parshat Ki Tavo, we read about a strange ceremony. God tells Moses that half of the tribes stand on Mount Gerizim and proclaim blessings, while the other half stand on Mount Eval and proclaim curses. While the blessings are presented as a series of positive outcomes for following God's commandments, the curses are a list of actions that will result in being cursed.

In this list, the verse that has always stuck out to me is Deuteronomy 27:19: "Cursed is the one who subverts the rights of the stranger, the orphan, and the widow." This is far from the only time that the Torah instructs us about proper treatment of these three categories of people; in fact, "love the stranger" is famously one of the most commonly repeated commandments in the Torah. However, this particular phrasing of "subverting the rights" of these people is unique to this verse.

Why these three categories of people, and what does it mean to subvert their rights? Several commentators explain that this verse is included here because subverting the rights of strangers, orphans, and widows can occur stealthily. It therefore fits with the theme of the rest of the list, which are all sins that can be easily hidden: moving a neighbor's property landmark, misdirecting a blind person, inappropriate sexual conduct with a family member, violence against a neighbor that occurs in secret.

Chizkuni's commentary on this verse explains that strangers,

orphans, and widows are all categories of people who lack influential protectors who will protest their mistreatment. Rabbi Adin Steinsaltz elaborates:

> These individuals are not always aware of the fact that their judgment has been distorted. The stranger might be unfamiliar with local laws and customs, the orphan is young and inexperienced, and the widow, accustomed to being under the aegis of her husband, would not typically be familiar with legal and procedural matters. Therefore, it is often a simple matter for the judges to distort their judgment without the matter coming to light.

In other words, this curse is specifically for injustice committed against people who are treated as outsiders in the community. This might include those who are new to the community, those who don't understand the intricacies of the law, or those who are not represented in the halls of power. These people are vulnerable because there is no one looking out for them, so it's easy to get away with treating them unfairly.

The Torah's solution is to admonish those who would treat these categories of people unjustly. But I think the solution needs to be deeper than that. Rather than simply telling those in power to be fair, we need to look at who is being included and represented in leadership. If there is no one protecting the most vulnerable categories of people, then we not only need to step up to protect them, but we also need to help them gain the power to protect themselves.

In my work on synagogue belonging, we often ask the question: Who is not in this room? Whom are we leaving out of the conversation? Whom might we be pushing away by not making space for them? Who is being treated as an outsider? For my community, those marginalized groups include people

of color, LGBTQ+ people, people with disabilities, interfaith families, and people with different levels of religious observance. We are taking steps to bring these people more fully into the conversation and to make sure that they are represented in our community's decision-making.

It is not enough to say "treat marginalized people fairly;" the simple absence of unfairness doesn't make us welcoming. Instead, we must examine the roots of injustice and take active steps to create change. We must look more closely at who is marginalized and why, and work to give those who have been marginalized a voice.*(Cantor Sarah Bolts (she/her) is the associate cantor at B'nai Israel Congregation in Rockville, MD, where she works on belonging and inclusion initiatives in addition to her cantorial duties. She was ordained at Hebrew College in 2016. Prior to her ordination, Cantor Bolts spent many years as an active leader at Kavod Boston, a social justice-oriented Jewish community for young adults.)*

After Liberation: Ki Tavo by Job Y Jindo
https://www.jtsa.edu/torah/after-liberation/

In memory of Avi Sagi (1953–2026)

Parashat Ki Tavo opens with two ceremonies: the presentation of the first fruits (Deut. 26:1–11) and a declaration made after distributing the triennial tithe to the Levite, the stranger, the orphan, and the widow (26:12–15). Their location is puzzling.

The first ceremony concerns an agricultural offering brought to the sanctuary and celebrated with the Levite and the stranger. It might therefore seem more at home in Deuteronomy 16, among the laws of the pilgrimage festivals. The second concerns the tithe distributed every third year to those without land or comparable security. Why was it not placed in Deuteronomy 14:22–29, where that tithe has already been

commanded? In each case, the affinities are not only thematic but also phraseological. Their placement here, rather than alongside the laws to which they most immediately correspond, is therefore striking, made all the more suggestive by the presence of the stranger in both ceremonies.

Whatever the history behind their placement, the interpretive question remains. After legislation concerning worship, courts, kings, warfare, family life, property, and social obligation, the legal section culminates not in a grand public institution but in two declarations spoken by ordinary individuals: one while presenting produce, the other after distributing food. Is this merely an accident of arrangement, or might their placement disclose something about the purpose of the covenantal laws?

One way of reading these ceremonies is to consider them within the broader covenantal drama of the Torah. Read not only in its ancient context but also as a living source of insight into the human condition, this drama can illuminate several existential dimensions of freedom.

Exodus concerns Israel's departure from Egypt: liberation from slavery and external coercion—from Pharaoh's domination.

Numbers turns to what remains internally after that departure. Although the people have physically left Egypt, at moments of fear and deprivation they remember it with longing, recalling its food, proposing to return, and even describing it in the language of the promised land (e.g., Num 11:4–6; 14:2–4; 16:12–14). Egypt remains present in their imagination, continuing to shape how they perceive their circumstances and the future.

Deuteronomy turns to a further dimension of freedom: life after liberation, when a people becomes settled, secure, and affluent. The question is no longer only how people are

released from external domination, or how it persists internally in the imagination, but how freedom itself may reshape the self. The capacity to think and act for oneself can gradually become the habit of seeing the world primarily, or even exclusively, from oneself.

Moses anticipates the Israelites saying in the promised land, "My own power and the might of my own hand have won this wealth for me" (Deut 8:17). The statement expresses more than pride in achievement or forgetfulness of its source. It describes a perspective in which success encourages the self to regard its life as self-generated and complete in itself. Agency can harden into self-sufficiency, enclosing the self within its own purposes and concerns.

Seen in this light, Egypt in biblical thought may signify not only a place or political regime but also an existential possibility. Pharaoh represents a form of selfhood enclosed within its own horizon, in which the sovereignty of the self leaves little room for the presence of the other, divine or human. A people may leave Egypt, and Egypt may gradually lose its hold on its collective memory, while this mode of selfhood can resurface —not outside, but within the liberated self. To live as a free people in the ancestral land is thus more than a political achievement. It remains an ongoing—and perhaps never-ending—existential challenge: the formation of a covenantal society whose way of life is fundamentally antithetical to Egypt.

Against this background, the conjunction of the two ceremonies in Deuteronomy 26 acquires particular interpretive force. They may be read together as moments in which the character of covenantal life comes into view along two axes: the vertical relation to the divine and the horizontal relation to

other human beings.

In the first ceremony, the speaker recounts a history that begins with a “fugitive Aramean” and ends with the land YHWH “gave us” (26:5–9). Even someone born in the land declares, “I acknowledge this day … that I have entered the land” (26:3). The speaker is thus placed within a history of landlessness, dependence, and deliverance, so that present security and prosperity are understood not as self-generated but as something received through a past that precedes the individual.

The first fruits are therefore not “given” to God but “brought” as something God has first given: “I bring the first fruits of the soil which You, YHWH, have given me” (26:10). Along the vertical axis, possession is thus reinterpreted as reception rather than self-sufficiency.[1]

The horizontal axis then comes into view. The celebration includes “together with the Levite and the stranger” (26:11), while the second declaration concerns food already distributed to “the Levite, the stranger, the orphan, and the widow,” so that they may eat their fill (26:12–13).

The issue is not simply an obligation to assist those who have less. The deeper question arises precisely in moments of abundance and happiness. As the renowned professor of Jewish thought and ethics Avi Sagi observed, “self-fullness could lead to self-enclosure.”[2] Does happiness close the self within its own horizon, or leave the other—again, divine or human—visible and present?

Taken together, the two ceremonies connect self-understanding with its implications for the stranger. They thereby ask not only how the stranger is treated, but what kind of self emerges in freedom.

This twofold movement recalls Heschel's oft-quoted reading of the Decalogue, whose two halves likewise proceed from the vertical to the horizontal axis, as a movement from outer to inner freedom: from the opening declaration of liberation from Egypt to the final prohibition against coveting.[3] Deuteronomy 26 may be read as giving ritual expression to that movement.

Such a reading offers an account of why the two ceremonies stand at the culmination of Deuteronomy's covenantal laws. The first-fruits declaration begins with a landless ancestor and ends with the stranger joining the celebration. As Sagi writes, "The redemption of Israel is not redemption from the stranger but with the stranger."[4] The movement is in fact reciprocal: recognition of the other's humanity both grows out of and further deepens one's own humanity. The enduring significance of the Exodus therefore lies not only in what freedom makes of the human being, but also in whether such recognition can become a lived reality. How, then, does it take root in human life? Do practices of remembering, declaring, and giving help bring it about, or are they themselves expressions of something already underway—through encounters, shifts in perception, a deeper transformation of inner life, or other paths yet to be named? *(Job Y. Jindo is Professor of Bible and Comparative Religion, Academy of Jewish Religion, Adjunct Professor, Bible, JTS)*

[1] On divine "giving" and human "bringing," see Martin Buber, On the Bible: Eighteen Studies (ed. Nahum N. Glatzer; New York: Schocken, 1968), 122–130. [2] Avi Sagi, Reflections on Identity: The Jewish Case (trans. Batya Stein; Boston: Academic Studies Press, 2016), 181. [3] Abraham J. Heschel, The Sabbath: Its Meaning for Modern Man (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1951), 89–90
[4] Sagi, Reflections on Identity, 182.

Ki Tavo: The Other Side of Arevut

by Rabbanit Ilana Gimplelvich

https://yeshivatmaharat.org/the-other-side-of-arevut/

When the Sages established the order of the weekly Torah readings, the subject matter of the parshiyot did not necessarily correspond to the season and the cycle of the Jewish holidays. One of the few exceptions is Parshat Ki Tavo. In Gemara Megillah 31b, there is an insistence on reading Ki Tavo before Rosh HaShana, the beginning of the New Year. The reason given is "tikhle hashana v'kileloteha," "may the year and its curses end." This phrase expresses a very human desire to leave the difficulties and misfortunes of the previous year behind and begin the new year with a clean slate. But the Gemara is making a much more literal reference: the "curses" are the klalot that appear at the end of Parshat Ki Tavo. The curses are terrible, accusatory, and awe-inspiring.

The curses and the warnings which were uttered by Moshe Rabbeinu are not original: the text of the curses was already written down previously, in Parshat Bechukotai. The question must be: What is gained by repeating such curses?

The answer lies in the close reading of the text, and in considering the timing when the klalot were uttered. The original set, first uttered in Bechukotai, is the language of G-d addressing the generation that left Egypt. The text in Ki Tavo is spoken by Moshe, and is a renewal of the covenant, which was originally told to the children of the previous generation.The two sets of curses may sound similar, but they are tailored to two very different audiences. A closer look at the language and the structure of each set yields significant distinctions.

The original set addresses the entire congregation in the plural. Ki Tavo, in contrast, addresses the individual using singular language. But the differences do not end there—Ki Tavo has many more klalot than Bechukotai, double the number of the original list.

The Torah, which utilizes an economy of language, does not waste space on needless repetition, which begs the question: what is Moshe trying to achieve by doubling the number of curses?

According to Kli Yakar, R. Shelomo Ephraim Luntschitz, (Poland, 17th century), the timing of the blessings and the curses holds the key to resolving the dilemmas mentioned above. In Bechukotai, the Jewish people were treated as one large collective entity. The blessing was communal, and so was the curse. Consequently, an individual who sins does not have power to bring the punishment upon the rest of the congregation. Two examples come to mind: the wood gatherer who violated Shabbat and the blasphemer who cursed G-d both incurred a death penalty, yet the rest of the congregation was not punished for the actions of the individuals.

Ki Tavo introduces a different model. The blessings and the curses come on the heels of the Jewish nation standing on the mountains of Gerizim and Eval and participating in arevut: a mutual pledge. After the Jews have accepted upon themselves the responsibility for their fellow Jews, the section listing the blessings and the curses is stated in the singular. This shift specifically highlights that the transgressions of one individual affect the community. Once the model of arevut is accepted by the Jewish people, no one can claim that his behavior is purely private.

According to Kli Yakar, the doubling of the curses is a

representation of how an individual is responsible for bringing troubles not only upon himself, but also upon the community. This can be dramatically demonstrated at the conquest of Ai in the book of Yehoshua: when Achan displays greed and takes spoils for himself, contrary to explicit instructions, it does not remain a private matter. The whole community suffers a loss of fighters. Their death is an alarm and a cause for Yehoshua to probe and seek an individual who is adversely affecting the collective.

The Talmud (Shevuot 39A) states that "Kol Yisrael arevim ze ba'ze"—"all Jews are responsible for one another." Usually, this principle is employed to emphasize how interconnected Jews are, and how one person doing mitzvot can affect others, or can be a messenger in saying the blessings on behalf of others. Kli Yakar shows us the flipside of arevut: when one Jew behaves unethically or sinfully, everyone is affected and everyone suffers.

This brings us to a reason why Ki Tavo is read publicly before Rosh HaShana: each and every Jew needs a wake-up call, a reminder that the actions of the individual affect the entire kehilla. "tikhle hashana v'kileloteha" is no longer a nice sentiment and an attempt to leave the past in the past. It is, rather, a call for action: in order for the curses of the passing year to end, each and every person needs to engage in earnest soul-searching and self-improvement. Only once the deep inner recesses of the heart have been examined, the conclusion of the piyut Achot Ketana, "tachel shana ubirkhoteha" "May the year and its blessings commence," comes into force. The curses end when we recognize that what each of us does matters to all of us.

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Yahrtzeits

Lisa Small remembers her brother Joshua Small on Sat. Aug. 29.
Rebecca Greene remembers her uncle Howard Mendelsohn on Mon. Aug. 31.
Steve Sklar remembers his father David Sklar on Wed. Sept. 2.