

PORTION	DATE	HEB DATE	TORAH	NEVIIM	RENEWED
Ki Tavo	21 Sept. 2019	21 Elul 5779	Deut. 26:1-29:9	Isa. 60:1-22	Matt. 4:13-24

This week's Torah portion Ki Tavo is always read two weeks before Rosh Hashanah as it contains admonitions. And it would be inauspicious to start the New Year on a negative note, so it is never read right before Rosh Hashanah. It also befit the themes of the month, Elul as well as spiritual preparation for the coming New Year. Therefore, the words "Ki Tov" (When you arrive) can be interpreted as an allusion to our process of renewal and repentance when we achieve our goal.

Today's portion begins with Moshe looking into his people's future in the Eretz Yisrael. His vision of the future begins with this generation who is about to enter the Promised Land and instructs them in the annual commandment of bringing the Bikkurim up to the Temple before the officiating kohen (priest) before the altar of Hashem. The donor acknowledges and expresses his thanks to Hashem for all the good in his own personal life and in the collective life of the nation.

The Mishneh in tractate Bikkurim describe the immense joy and feeling of unity of the people as they converge throughout the land and form caravans going up to Yerushalayim (ירושלים) with their first fruits. The first fruits are to be brought from the seven species¹ for which the Land of Yisrael is praised, "a land of wheat, barley, grapevines, figs, and pomegranates; a land of [olive] oils and [date] honey."

The whole underlying concept of this parashat is joy. Thus, the first word which opens the portion is 'v'haya' (וְהָיָה), and it shall be) always indicates joy. After relating the details of the commandment of Bikkurim, the parashat describes the unique ceremony which the Children of Yisrael were commanded to enact the very day upon which they cross the Yarden and enter into the Land of Yisrael.

The main component of this observance will be a renewal of the people's covenant with Hashem. They shall travel all the way to the area of Shechem, where they will set up great stones on Mount Ebal, plaster them, and inscribe them with the words of the Torah. The nation is instructed to build an altar upon Mount Ebal and to bring offerings upon it – and afterward, to hold the Assembly of Mount Gerizim and Mount Ebal wherein Yisrael would formalize and seal a covenant with Hashem regarding all these commandments in which they have been instructed since parashat Re'eh. (Devarim chapter 27)

The half the tribes of Yisrael stand on Mount Gerizim and the other half on Mount Ebal with the tribe of Levi and the Ark of the Covenant between the mountains. Specific warnings for serious transgressions were to be made. After this, the blessings were read. The blessing that will befall the people if they keep and uphold the covenant and the commandments, and longer list of curses which will be the result of not keeping the covenant.

The experience of Bikkurim beckons us to look at the beauty in our lives. Such experience and joy, and what life it would be all the time if only it could be lived to the fullest. Moshe is telling this generation a taste of life fulfilled when we fully comprehend during this month of Elul. 'Ani l'dodi li v'dodi li' (I am to my beloved and my beloved is to me' (Song 6:3). This verse teaches us the intimacy of our relationship with Hashem. It's also about community, commitment, recognition, thankfulness, and most of all, acknowledgment of Hashem in the life of the individual and in the life of the nation.

¹ Devarim 8:8

Although the first-fruits were brought from all seven species, the Mishna only mentions these three types of fruit, date, grapes, pomegranates. The Arizal explains that this is a *tikkun* (return) for the sin of the spies who sinned by slandering the Land with their evil report that casted doubt upon the people's ability to inherit the Land. "They arrived at the Valley of Eshkol and cut from there a vine with one cluster of grapes, and bore it on a double pole, and of the pomegranates and of the figs." (Vayikra 13:23) It was these three species which they carried with them to show the fruit of the land in a negative light, and through which they facilitated their lies. Thus, when Yisrael brings the first fruit in great joy they are 'fixing' the damage caused by the spies who used these three species against the Land.

The section of the parashat known as the curses or admonitions consists of verse that are difficult to read and to comprehend, though we know that everything is from Hashem and everything is ultimately for our good. Hidden amongst the curses, there is a verse that it does not lay the blame or fault with any lack of scrupulous observance or insufficient piety in attendance to observing the commandments. Rather, the verse instructs us that all this befalls on us "because you did not serve Hashem, your Elohim, amid gladness and goodness of heart, when everything was abundant." (Devarim 27:24)

The curses are the direct translation of the concealment of Hashem in our lives. We cause that, not Him. So, why do we blame Him for our own shortcomings? Perhaps we blame Him because we can't take the responsibility of being accountable? The Torah warns us these curses will be visited upon us for not serving Hashem in joy and gratitude.

The hidden treasure is that this parashat begins before it began. It begins at the conclusion of last week's parashat of Ki Teitzei with the Divine commandment of Hashem to destroy Amalek. Everything we are learning in this week's portion of Ki Tavo, the joy of the first fruit, the joy of living in the Land of Yisrael, the joy of serving Hashem with gladness, the lack of which is the reason for the curses. All this, this is the direction continuation of the commandment to destroy Amalek.

The spirit of Amalek is the source of the disconnect from Hashem, the diametric opposite of the Temple consciousness and bringing *bikkurim* to the Temple of Hashem. Because the spirit of Amalek seeks to make us forget Hashem's presence in the world. Amalek declares there is no Elohim. Amalek separates itself and seeks to separate all creation which is the source of life. Thus, we are commanded as a Divine act, to enact total and utter vengeance and destruction. Because Amalek's singularity emanates from the highest level of hating Yisrael. Amalek's total and all-encompassing hatred of Yisrael is the reason for Hashem's total declaration of war against him.