

In this Issue

- **Covenant & Conversation** by Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks
- **M'oray Ha'Aish** by Rabbi Ari Kahn
- **Rabbi Frand on the Weekly Torah Portion** by Rabbi Yissocher Frand
- **Between the Lines** by Rabbi Abba Wagensberg



A Sense of History

Ki Tavo begins with the ceremony of bringing first fruits to the Temple. The Mishnah (Bikkurim 3) 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 came near 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 them that came in, they used to go forth. All the craftsmen in Jerusalem used to rise up to for them and greet them, saying, "Brothers, men of such-and-such a place, you are welcome."

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 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 on 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 firstfruits might have recited a song of praise to G-d 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. (Zakhor: 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 internalization 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.



A Recipe for Happiness

Modern man is many things, but more than anything else, modern man is privileged. Had previous generations caught a glimpse of our lives they would have been in awe, convinced that we live in utopia. So much of the drudgework that constituted the majority of daily life in antiquity, the menial labor that made subsistence possible, has been conquered by automation. The convenience and luxury of modern life, which we often take for granted, transcend the imagination of the great thinkers of the past and put the wildest dreams of the wealthy and powerful of yesteryear to shame.

And yet, with all of this technology, with all of the ease and comfort, modern man is not happy. Are ad agencies and large corporations solely to blame? Can we attribute depression, anxiety and dysfunctionality to the billions of dollars they spend each year to make us constantly aware that we do not yet own the newest, sleekest, smallest (or largest), most powerful model? Can our malaise be merely the product of envy, or is something else missing?

Parashat Ki Tavo to a great extent deals with happiness. The opening paragraphs command the farmer, who has worked hard all year, to bring his first fruits to Jerusalem and express his thanks to God for this bounty. The prayer of thanksgiving is woven together with a brief re-telling of our national history: We recall our national origins, the period of slavery, the years of wandering and homelessness. We

recall a time and place when we were threatened, and our very survival was uncertain. This display of historical consciousness is designed to give context to our current success. Our hard work has paid off, but it was built on the experiences of the past; moreover, when contrasted with the hopelessness of the past, our current success is that much sweeter.

There is, however, another aspect to the rite of the first fruits: We are commanded to thank God for His gifts, thus recognizing a type of partnership with God. Our material success is not ours alone; it is not only our hard work and our national or historical consciousness that has allowed us to achieve. Just as we are not alone when our prospects seem bleak, so too we are not alone when we succeed, through the sweat of our brow, to build and innovate, sow and reap, invent and improve our lives.

Modern man, intoxicated with his own success, is prone to hubris. He sees himself as a self-made man, and worships his 'creator' every time he glances in the mirror. But tragically, despite all of his achievements, modern man quite often feels very much alone. Although we have at our disposal almost inconceivable tools of communication, we have lost touch with ourselves. We have forgotten how to speak honestly with ourselves, and how to speak to God. The barrage of communication and information all but drowns out the sound of our inner voice, and we fall out of touch; authentic prayer is dismissed as a quaint, abandoned tradition from the past.

Like Narcissus gazing into the water while perched on a rock, modern man no longer recalls where he came from, and his own self-absorption mesmerizes him. He is isolated, and because he has forgotten the past, he has no humility, no perspective, no context. At the same time, he jeopardizes his connection with the future: Only when we transmit historical consciousness to our children, and live beyond the narrow confines of the present, do we

stand a chance of being appreciated by our children - rather than being rejected, in turn, as a relic from the past.

The Torah gives us a formula to combat narcissism, hubris and the existential loneliness they cause - a recipe for happiness: Keep an eye on the past. Know that you are part of something much greater than yourself - a nation that has arisen through trials and tribulations. Remember where we come from. Bring God into the celebration of your success; celebrate in front of God and thank God for your good fortune. Share this perspective with your spouse, and with your children. Be generous; share your happiness and the gifts God has given you with those who are less fortunate:

And you shall rejoice in all the good that the Almighty God has given you and your household; you and the Levi, and the stranger in your midst. (Dvarim 22:11)

The recipe for happiness combines all these things: Hard work to keep you honest; historical consciousness to provide context for your success; family and community to provide perspective. Healthy communication, generosity and humility will be inevitable dividends.

For a more in-depth analysis see: <http://arikahn.blogspot.co.il/2013/08/essays-and-lectures-parashat-ki-tavo.html>



Expanded Borders

"And you will be only on top and not on the bottom" (28:13).

You can't be on top and on the bottom at the same time. If you're on top, you're obviously not on the bottom, and vice versa. Why then does the Torah have to tell us that "you will be only on top and not on the bottom"?

Rav Tzaddok Hakohein of Lublin draws our attention to the prayer of Yaavetz (*Divrei Hayamim* I 4:10), "If You will bless me and extend my borders." Why does he ask for both a blessing and an extension? Rav Tzaddok explains that people may be given tremendous bounty, but if they are not properly equipped to handle it, it can destroy their lives. Yaavetz asked Hashem for a blessing, but prudently, he also asked Hashem to extend his borders. He asked to become a bigger, better and wiser person, a man of deep understanding and broad horizons, a man who would be the master of his blessings.

There are classic examples in today's society of people who receive blessings but are not equipped to handle it. We see actors become overnight sensations. They become instant multimillionaires. They buy huge mansions and expensive cars, and they take on the ultra-affluent, high-profile lifestyle of a celebrity. But they don't know how to do it, because after all, they are only ordinary people. And so they have higher rates of divorce, drug abuse, alcoholism and mental breakdown than in any other sector of society. Their blessings turn out to be a curse.

The same holds true with athletes. A fellow can throw a ninety-five miles per hour fastball and has control of his curve ball, and all of a sudden, he's making \$10 Million a year. People are hanging on his every word.

"What did you think of this? What did you think

of that?"

"Think? What does that mean?"

The guy is a millionaire, his picture is on magazines everywhere, and kids are asking him for autographs. He thinks he is someone, but he is nothing. He received a blessing, but he is not equipped to handle it.

Ordinary people win the lottery. One day they're stuffing bags in the post office, and the next they're multimillionaires. How are they affected? Their lives fall apart. Often, they get divorced or commit suicide. The man hasn't changed. He is still the same insignificant postal worker. He doesn't know how to deal with a million dollars, and so, it destroys his life.

How does one become a bigger person? The Talmud elaborates (*Temurah* 16a) on the prayer of Yaavetz, "If you will bless me with Torah and expand my borders with disciples." We become bigger, expanded people by giving to others. If you give me Torah, Yaavetz prayed, give me disciples with whom to share it.

We grow by being parents. We grow by becoming community-minded individuals. We grow by helping the poor. When we give to others, we go beyond the narrow borders of our own existence. We become broader, more sensitive, people with expanded horizons.

The Talmud states (*Taanis* 9a), "*Asser bishvil she'tis'asher*. Tithe in order to become rich." At first glance, this may seem like some sort of *segulah*, a charm, but it is nothing of the sort. Rav Tzaddok says that this is a logical mechanism. The more money you give away, the more people become dependent on you, the bigger you will become. The more your needs grow, the more Hashem will give you, the more your spheres of influence will expand, the bigger you will become. And so on."

This is the nature of things. The more one makes oneself indispensable to others, the more one grows. The more one grows, the more one is capable of handling it.

Perhaps this is what the Torah meant by the double blessing of "you will be on top" and "you will not be on bottom." Hashem will give us so much blessing that we will be "on top." And at the same time, He will make sure that we don't remain "on bottom," little people with blessings too big to handle. He will help us grow and expand to receive the blessings properly.



An Out Loud Prayer

Greetings from the holy city of Jerusalem!

This week's parsha discusses the mitzvah of "first fruits." A Jew who owns land in Israel and grows produce on it - specifically, the seven species for which the Land of Israel is praised - must gather the first of his crop in a basket and take it to the Temple, where a special ceremony takes place (see Deut. 26:2). This parsha is always read prior to the beginning of Slichot prayers for forgiveness preceding Rosh Hashana. What is the message of this parsha, and how does it help us prepare for Slichot?

The Midrash (Tanchuma 1) states that Moses saw prophetically that the Temple would be destroyed in the future, and that the mitzvah of the first fruits would no longer be able to be fulfilled. In response, Moses instituted three

daily prayers to replace this service. The Midrash's statement is striking, since the Talmud (Brachot 26b) teaches that our three daily prayers were instituted by the Patriarchs. How can we understand this contradiction? Was it Moses or the Patriarchs who established our current system of prayer?

Furthermore, the Torah teaches that a specific statement must be recited by the person bringing the first fruits: "Then you shall answer and say... 'An Aramean destroyed my forefather...' (Deut. 26:5). Rashi (citing Sotah 32b) explains that the word "you shall answer" refers to calling out in a loud voice. How is this interpretation derived? According to the Siftei Chachamim (9), the literal meaning of "you shall answer" is logical only if another person has previously spoken, necessitating a response. In this instance, however, no one has spoken at all. Therefore, our Sages explained the phrase "you shall answer" to mean that we must say the prescribed statement in a loud voice.

This interpretation raises a difficulty. The Talmud (Brachot 24b) teaches that a person who raises his voice in prayer is considered to have little faith in God! Rashi explains that loud prayers imply a lack of belief that God can hear a whisper just as clearly. In practice, Jewish law follows this opinion (Orach Chaim 101:2, Mishna Brura 7). If we are not permitted to raise our voice in prayer, how can our Sages specifically require it at the time we bring the first fruits?

The commentator Chanukat HaTorah addresses this issue by stating that there are two categories of prayer. The first category is regular prayer, containing the three standard elements of praise, request and thanks. The second category is prayer that testifies explicitly that God hears our thoughts. There is an obvious difference between these two categories. It is forbidden to raise our voices if we are praying according to the first category, because the volume might be misconstrued as

a lack of belief. However, if we pray according to the second category, and explicitly state that God hears our thoughts, then surely He can also hear our whispers! Thus, it is permitted to raise our voices, because doing so will not lead to any improper assumptions.

Two Categories of Prayer

This helps us understand a seeming misstatement in the ceremony of the first fruits. The person bringing his produce is required to say, "An Aramean [Lavan] destroyed my forefather [Yaakov]." But historically, this is not true! If Lavan didn't kill Yaakov, why would the Torah command us to say that he did? Rashi explains (Deut. 26:5, based on Sifri and JT Peah 1:1) that Lavan *wanted* to destroy Yaakov and his entire family. Since, among the non-Jewish nations, evil thoughts have the same status as evil acts, Lavan's desire to kill Yaakov was considered an actual murder. Therefore, a Jew who explicitly states, "An Aramean destroyed my forefather" is effectively stating that God hears a person's thoughts! Therefore, the person falls under the second category of prayer, and is allowed to raise his voice.

Once we are permitted to raise our voice in prayer, it is actually preferable to do so. The Aruch HaShulchan (Orach Chaim 101:8) states that raising our voices in prayer awakens our hearts. Additionally, we can suggest that loud prayer helps free us of our inhibitions, which elevates the words we say.

The concept of two categories of prayer will resolve the problem of who instituted daily prayers as a replacement for the service of first fruits. Based on the Talmud (Eruvin 16b), which teaches "These and those are the words of the living God," we can suggest that both Moses AND the Patriarchs established our daily prayer service. The Patriarchs instituted prayer according to the first category, in which it is forbidden to call out loudly. Moses instituted prayer according to the second category, in

which we explicitly state God's omniscience.

We see that the Amidah, corresponding to the Patriarchs, is said silently. But when do we experience Moses's type of prayer? One example is the Slichot service, in which we ask God's forgiveness for not only our improper actions and speech, but even for inappropriate thoughts. Asking forgiveness for improper thoughts is tantamount to acknowledging that God is aware of them. Thus, it is permissible to raise our voices. Furthermore, according to some customs, Slichot are said immediately after the Amidah, thereby juxtaposing the Patriarchs (silent prayer) with Moses (heartfelt cries for forgiveness).

At last we see how this week's parsha relates to Slichot. When we read about the prayer spoken over the first fruits, we prepare ourselves to call out to God. Slichot, too, are spoken out loud, in order to awaken our emotions. They belong to the second category of prayer - Moses's category - in which we are encouraged to raise our voices to God and arouse our hearts to higher levels of connection.

May we all raise our voices in prayer so that, through truly meaning and feeling what we say, we arouse ourselves to become closer to God. In this merit may we be completely forgiven, and deserve to hear the loud shofar blast symbolizing the building of the Third Temple, where we'll once again bring the first fruits.