

Parashat Ki Thavo'**פָּרָשַׁת כִּי תָבֹא****INTRODUCTION:**

Parashat Ki Thavo' (Deut. 26:1-29:8) contains the following *sidrot*:

Hundred-and-Sixty-First Sidra', first-fruits, the third year tithe, the agreement, the writing down of the Torah and the setting up of the altar, the blessings and curses - those who are cursed;

Hundred-and-Sixty-Second Sidra', the blessings, the curses, Moses' prophecy, the conclusion to Moses' second farewell address, and the opening of Moses' third and final farewell address.

ANALYSIS:

Hundred-and-Sixty-First Sidra' (Deut. 26:1-27:26): First-fruits, the third year tithe, the agreement, writing down of the Torah and the setting up of the altar, the blessings and curses - those who are cursed.

Parashat Ki Thavo' opens with what is known as the First-Fruits Ceremony. The First-Fruits Ceremony took place three times a year on each of the Pilgrimage-Festivals when the first-fruits of the land of Israel pertaining to a particular Pilgrimage-Festival were placed into baskets, brought to the Temple, and presented to the *kohen*, "and they shall not be seen before My presence empty (handed)" (Ex. 23:14-17):

- i) Pilgrimage-Festival of *Massoth* [Unleavened Bread] - first cuttings of the barley harvest,
- ii) Pilgrimage-Festival of *Shavu'oth* [Weeks] - first cuttings of the wheat harvest, and,
- iii) Pilgrimage-Festival of *Sukkoth* [Booths] - first pickings of the fruit harvest.

When the basket containing the first-fruits is presented to the *kohen* at the Temple, the presenter declares, "*I have declared this day to YHWH your God, that I have come to the land, which YHWH swore to our fathers to give us.*" (Deut. 26:3) The *kohen* then takes the basket from the presenter's hand and sets it down before the altar of YHWH. The presenter answers and says before YHWH:

"My father was a perishing Aramean, and he went down to Egypt, and sojourned there with a few men; and he became there, a nation great mighty and many. And the Egyptians dealt ill with us and afflicted us; and placed upon us hard labour. Then we cried out, to YHWH God of our fathers; YHWH heard our voice, and He saw our affliction and our troubles and our oppression. And YHWH brought us out from Egypt, with a strong hand and with an outstretched arm, and with great fear; and with signs and with marvels. And He has brought us to this place; and has given to us this land, a land flowing with milk and honey. And now here I have brought the first-fruits of the soil, which You have given me YHWH." (Deut. 26:5-10)

The presenter then prostrates before YHWH, and rejoices along with the Levite and Sojourner, in all the good that YHWH has given him and his household.

As mentioned in *Parashat Re'e*, the tithes of every third and sixth year of the seven-year agricultural cycle are to be distributed amongst the landless (Levite and Sojourner), underprivileged, poor, and all those in need of welfare. When we complete the third year and sixth year tithing of all our produce, we are to declare before YHWH our God:

"I have consumed the holy-things from the house and also have given them to the Levite and to the Sojourner to the orphan and to the widow, according to all Your commandments that You have commanded me; I have not crossed over from Your commandments and I have not forgotten. I have not eaten from it in my sorrow and I have not consumed from it (while) in impurity, and I have not given from it to the dead; I have hearkened to the voice of YHWH my God, I have done, according to all that You have commanded me. Look down from Your holy habitation from the heavens and bless Your people Israel, and the soil, that You have given to us; as You swore to our fathers, a land flowing with milk and honey." (Deut. 26:13-15)

The Agreement:

Stipulation:

"This day YHWH your God has commanded you to do these laws and the judgements; you shall keep and do them, with all your heart and with all your soul/life-force." (Deut. 26:16)

Our Declaration:

"You have declared this day that YHWH; to be to you for a God and to walk in His ways and to keep His laws and His commandments and His judgements and to hearken to His voice." (Deut. 26:17)

YHWH's Declaration - Conditional:

"And YHWH has declared you this day to be to Him for a specially treasured people, as He spoke to you; and to keep all His commandments." (Deut. 26:18)

The Outcome if We Keep His Torah:

"And to set you most-high above all nations that He has made, for praise and for a name and for glory; and for you to be a holy people to YHWH your God as He has spoken." (Deut. 26:19)

The subject matter of the writing down of the Torah, the setting up of the altar, and the blessings and the curses - first introduced in *Parashat Re'e* - encompass the majority of the remaining sections of this *parasha*, "See I place before you today; a blessing and a curse." (Deut. 11:26). Moses commands the Elders of Israel that when the Children of Israel cross over the Jordan into the land of Canaan they are to raise up great stones upon Mount 'Eval. These stones are to be plastered with plaster and all the words of the Torah are to be written on them clearly and distinctly. Also on Mount 'Eval, an altar to YHWH is to be built out of complete stones that no iron implement has come upon, i.e. natural undressed stones, upon which wellbeing-offerings are to be sacrificed and the people are to rejoice before YHWH. "And Moses and the kohanim the Levities spoke, to all Israel saying; be silent and hearken Israel, this day you are becoming a people, to YHWH your God. You are to hearken, to the voice of YHWH your God; you are to

perform His commandments and His laws, that I command you today." (Deut. 27:9-10) (Notice that in this verse the *kohanim* are designated as belonging to the tribe of Levi.)

Next to come are the blessings and the curses. The blessings are to be pronounced from Mount Gerizzim [גֶּרִיזִים - from the root גָּרַז meaning to cut], whilst the curses are to be uttered from Mount 'Eval. Mounts Gerizzim and 'Eval face each other near the city of Shekhem. The nation is to be divided into two groups, according to their tribes, six tribes per group. One group is to stand before Mount Gerizzim and represent the blessings whilst the group is to stand before Mount 'Eval and represent the curses:

Mount Gerizzim - Blessings	Mount 'Eval - Curses
Simeon	Reuben
Levi	Gad
Judah	Asher
Issakhar	Zevulun
Joseph	Dan
Benjamin	Naphtali

Even though the tribe of Levi stands before Mount Gerizzim, members of the tribe are also to be stationed on both of the mountains in order to broadcast in loud and audible voices the blessings and the curses. There is to be an introduction before the pronouncement of the blessings and curses, which is a declaration to the effect that whoever practices certain acts is cursed. Each act commences with the phrase "*Cursed is...*" followed by the act that cause an individual to be cursed, then at the end of each act, the people say *Amen*.

Those Who are Cursed	
1st	Making a graven or molten image and setting it up in secret; this is an abomination to YHWH
2nd	Insulting one's father or mother
3rd	Displacing a neighbour's border
4th	Leading astray a blind person in the way
5th	Denying justice to the Sojourner, orphan, or widow
6th	Having sex with the wife of one's father
7th	Having sex with any animal
8th	Having sex with one's sister; even a half-sister
9th	Having sex with one's mother-in-law
10th	Striking [murdering] one's neighbour in secret
11th	Taking a bribe to bring down an innocent person with false charges
12th	Not establishing the words of the Torah in order to observe them

Hundred-and-Sixty-Second Sidra' (Deut. 28:1-29:8): The blessings, the curses, Moses' prophecy, the conclusion to Moses' second farewell address, and the opening of Moses' third and final farewell address.

If we heed the voice of YHWH, keep and observe all His commandments, then YHWH will set us on high above all the nations of the earth, bestowing all these blessings upon us:

The Blessings	
1st	We will be blessed in the cities and in the country-side
2nd	Our children will be blessed as will the fruit of our soil, the offspring of our animals, the offspring of our cattle and the fecundity of our sheep
3rd	We will be blessed in our baskets and kneading-troughs
4th	We will be blessed in our coming in and in our going out
5th	YHWH will cause our enemies who rise up against us to be smitten before us; by one road they will come against us, but by seven roads they will flee before us
6th	YHWH will command a blessing upon our storehouses, upon all the enterprises of our hands, and He will bless us in the Land that He has given us
7th	YHWH will establish us to be a holy people to Him - only if we keep His commandments and walk in His ways
8th	All the peoples of the earth will see that the name of YHWH is proclaimed over us, and they will be afraid of us
9th	YHWH will provide us with an abundance of good, in our children, in the offspring of our cattle, in the fruit of our soil, all in the Land that He swore to our fathers to give to us
10th	YHWH will provide sufficient rain in its season according to the need of our Land, bless all the works of our hands; to many nations we will lend, but from none we will borrow
11th	YHWH will set us at the head and not at the tail; we will only be on top and never at the bottom

These blessing will come about only if we hearken to the commandments of YHWH, keeping them and observing them. If we do not turn aside to the right or to the left from all the words that YHWH commands us, by walking after other gods and serving them.

However, if we do not hearken to the voice of YHWH, and do not keep or observe all His commandments and His laws, then there will come upon us all these curses, which will overtake us:

The Curses	
1st	We will be cursed in the city and in the country-side
2nd	We will be cursed in our baskets and kneading-troughs
3rd	Cursed will be our children as well as the fruit of our soil, the offspring of our animals, the offspring of our cattle, and the fecundity of our sheep
4th	We will be cursed in our coming in and in our going out

5th	YHWH will send against us and against all the enterprises of our hands curse, discomfiture, and rebuke, until we quickly perish and are destroyed because we abandoned Him through our evil deeds
6th	YHWH will send pestilence until it finishes us off
7th	YHWH will strike us with consumption, fever, inflammation, extreme burning, sword, blasting, and mildew; until we perish
8th	The heavens will be like bronze, and the earth like iron
9th	YHWH will make the rain of our land powder and dust (sand storms) until we are destroyed
10th	YHWH will cause us to be defeated by our enemies, by one road we will go out against them, by seven roads we will flee before them, we will be as a warning to all the kingdoms of the earth
11th	Our carcass will be food for the fowl and the beasts, with none to frighten them away
12th	YHWH will strike us with boils of Egypt, tumours, itching, and scabs, that cannot be healed
13th	YHWH will strike us with madness, blindness, and bewilderment of heart
14th	We will grope at noon as the blind gropes in the darkness, our ways will not succeed, will be oppressed, and robbed all the days; but there will be no saviour
15th	A man will betroth a woman but another man will violate her, we will build houses but will not dwell in them, plant vineyards but will not enjoy the fruit of its fifth fruit-bearing year (see <i>Parashat Mishpatim</i>)
16th	Our ox will be butchered before our eyes, but we will not eat of it, our donkey will be robbed from before us and not returned, our sheep will be given to our enemies; and there will be no saviour for us
17th	Our children will be given to another people, we will be powerless to stop it, and we will languish for them all our days
18th	A people unknown to us will consume the fruit of our soil the produce of our toil; we will be oppressed and crushed all the days
19th	We will go mad from the sights that our eyes will see
20th	YHWH will strike us with evil boils for which there is no cure, from the sole of our foot up to our crown
21st	YHWH will lead us and our king - whom we raised over ourselves - into Exile to an unknown nation, there we will serve other gods of wood and stone
22nd	In Exile, we will become an astonishment, a proverb, and a byword
23rd	We will sow much seed but will gather in little, since locusts will ravage the crop

24th	We will plant and tend vineyards, but their wine we will not drink, nor store; for the worm will eat them
25th	Olive trees will be in abundance throughout our territory, but we will not have any oil for pouring; for our olives will drop off
26th	Our children will not be ours since they will go into captivity
27th	All our trees and the fruit of our soil the locust will possess
28th	The Sojourner in our midst will rise high and higher, while we descend lower and lower, he will lend to us, but we will not lend to him, he will become the head, but we will become the tail

Moses then prophesises that these curses will befall the nation; "*And all these curses shall come upon you and shall pursue you and overtake you, until you shall be destroyed; since you did not hearken to the voice of YHWH your God, to keep His commandments and His laws which He commanded you. And they shall be upon you, for a sign and for a wonder; and upon your seed forever. Since you did not serve YHWH your God, in joy and with a good heart; because of the abundance of all things.*" (Deut. 28:45-47) Since we are not willing to serve YHWH, then He will send against us an enemy whom we will be compelled to serve. An enemy who will bring upon us hunger, thirst, nakedness, and a general lack of everything; an iron yoke around our neck, until he has destroyed us. This enemy, this nation that YHWH will raise up against us, will come from afar, flying swiftly like a vulture, whose language we do not understand, a fierce nation that refuses to aid the elderly or show grace to the young. They will consume our beasts and our produce until we have been destroyed; no grain, new wine, fresh oil, offspring of our cattle or fecundity of our sheep, will remain until they have caused us to perish. The cities throughout the land that YHWH has given us - cities in which we feel secure - will be besieged until their high and fortified walls collapse. Due to our destitution brought about by this enemy, we will consume the flesh of our own children. Even the most tender and daintiest of our citizens will behave like wild animals towards their own, consuming their children, as well as the new born along with the afterbirth. All this will come about, "*If you shall not keep to all the words of this Torah, those written in this book; to revere this honoured and awesome name, YHWH your God.*" (Deut. 28:58) Then YHWH will place upon us extraordinary plagues, visiting upon us all the diseases of Egypt, (in this section Egypt is mentioned as an example due to its familiarity). Instead of being like the stars of the heavens only a few of us will remain, all because we did not listen to the voice of YHWH our God. As YHWH once rejoiced over us to do good by us and by increasing our numbers, now He will rejoice in causing us to perish and by destroying us; uprooting us from the soil that He gave to us as a possession. YHWH will disperse us among all the peoples of the earth - to every inhabitable continent - there we will serve other gods whom we have never known, gods of wood and stone. In our Exile among the nations, YHWH will make sure that there will be no repose for us, but instead we will wander from nation to nation. We will languish in Exile with great trepidation and desperation, amidst great persecutions, massacres, and horrors; we will fear for our very existence. "*YHWH will return you to Egypt in ships, by the route of which I had said to you, you shall see it no more again; and there you shall sell yourselves to your enemies for servants and for maids and no man shall buy you.*" (Deut. 28:68)

"These are the words of the covenant that YHWH commanded Moses to cut with the Children of Israel in the land of Moab; aside from the covenant, that He cut with them at Horev." (Deut. 28:69)

Moses' third and final farewell address opens with him calling together all Israel and saying to them that they themselves saw with their very own eyes all that YHWH did in the land of Egypt, to Pharaoh, his servants, and to all his land; great trials, great signs and wonders. *"Has not YHWH given to you a heart to know, and eyes to see and ears to hear; until this day."* (Deut. 29:3) Moses relates how during the forty years of wandering in the wilderness neither their garments nor their shoes wore out, bread they did not eat, nor did they drink wine and beer. How when they reached Gil'ad in Transjordania, Sihon king of Heshbon and 'Og king of Bashan made war on them, but they struck them down, taking their land and giving it as an inheritance to the Reubenites, Gadites, and to half the tribe of Manasseh. *"And you shall keep the words of this covenant, and you shall do them, in order that you shall be prudent, in all that you do."* (Deut. 29:8)

TEACHINGS OF HAKHAM REKHAVI:

Wow! This *parasha*, is as the hippies of the sixties would have said, "Heavy man!"

We have agreed as a nation - whether the individual likes it or not - to be His people, a privileged and honoured position that brings with it a great responsibility. In order to be His people we must accept YHWH as our God and walk in His ways, *"do and keep"* i.e. perform and internalize His Torah.

In return, by upholding this agreement, by virtue of observing the Torah on a national level, we will become a holy people and the greatest of all the nations, receiving His blessings. The Hundred-and-Sixty-Second *Sidra'* elucidates the benefits of receiving His blessings.

However, there is a flip-side to this agreement; what would happen if we broke our side of the Covenant?

Well first, there is the individual who is cursed by YHWH for performing certain acts and for not learning the Torah in order to make it a part of their daily life. Then there are the national curses, in other words if we fail to keep the Covenant on a national scale, then really bad things will happen. But how bad can it get?

First, all the blessings will be inverted and changed into curses, along with continuous crop shortage due to "natural causes" i.e. lack of rain, pest, and disease, which will in turn eventually bring about famine. There will be outbreaks of recurring diseases, we will be struck with madness, blindness, and bewilderment of heart and our undertakings will not succeed. The powerful amongst us will oppress the weaker; there will be no saviour.

Instead of justice and righteousness reigning supreme, injustice will govern the day hand in hand with sexual depravity, immorality, and an absence of social-justice; but there will be no saviour.

Instead of military victories, there will be defeats, and our enemies will take hostages and captives. A people unknown to us i.e. a nation that is not on our borders, will come and conquer us and take unbearable tribute that will reduce our food supply, oppress us and crush us, with barbarity. Eventually, the unknown nation will lead us into Exile where we will serve their gods. The unknown nation that conquers Israel and initiates the First Exile would therefore be the Akkadians, a Semitic-speaking people who came to dominate Mesopotamia. The Akkadians split into two peoples, the northern Akkadians who became the Assyrians, and the southern Akkadians who became the Babylonians.

Both the Assyrian Empire 911-612 B.C.E. and the Babylonian Empire 626-539 B.C.E. conquered the land of Israel and exiled a large proportion of the population to Mesopotamia. What brought about the First Exile?

Since you did not hearken to the voice of YHWH your God, to keep His commandments and His laws which He commanded you. (Deut. 28:45)

However, it would seem from the curses that we return to the Land, as we did, only to once more err, and bring more curses upon ourselves. We will have problems with locusts ravaging our crops and pests consuming the produce of the vine, and diseased trees devastating the olive oil industry (a major industry in ancient times). We will once again be attacked by a nation and our children will be taken into captivity. The last curse states that, *"The Sojourner in your midst, will rise above you high and higher; and you will descend lower and lower."* (Deut. 28:43) It is interesting to note that the Herodian Dynasty 37 B.C.E. - 92 C.E. (named after the first king of the dynasty Herod the Great 37-4 B.C.E.) the last dynasty that ruled Israel before the Roman Exile, i.e. the Second Exile, was of Edomite origin!

Moses then continues with his prophecy. At the time when the Sojourner rules over us, there will be a new enemy. This new enemy, who will in time rule over us, is different from the old enemy of the First Exile. This new enemy is cruel, not just in its military tactics, but in the very nature and fabric of its society. An enemy that demands a tribute that is impossible for a Torah observing nation to uphold, an enemy who will crush us. Unlike the first enemy that came from the same region of the world as we do whose language was not unlike our own, this new enemy will come from afar, an enemy flying swiftly like a vulture, speaking a language we do not understand; this is the Roman Empire. The Roman occupation was religious as well as physically and psychologically oppressive. Revolts against Roman domination in the land of Israel were many and spasmodic, but there were two great uprisings the First Jewish - Roman War 66-73 C.E. and the Bar Kokheva Revolt 132-136 C.E. The first resulted in the destruction of the Temple in addition to the Jewish population being devastated, while the second brought in its wake an even greater devastation of the Jewish population, mass Exile, and the name of the country was changed as an anti-Jewish measure from Judea to Palastina after the ancient Philistines. The Torah states that this enemy will besiege our cities in which we feel secure, and destroy their high and well fortified walls, as was the case with Jerusalem in 70 C.E. The wars against this enemy will bring about unbearable horrors; mothers will eat their new born out of the desperation caused by starvation. Our numbers will be significantly reduced, and once again, we will be uprooted from the Land and the reason for the Second Exile?

Since you did not serve YHWH your God, in joy and with a good heart; because of the abundance of all things. (Deut. 28:45-47)

Unlike the first Exile, which was contained within the Middle East, the Second Exile will be global, to the extent that we will be taken into Exile by ships! After both revolts, the Romans transported large quantities of Jewish captives to be sold in the various slave markets around the empire, those who could not be sold ended up being killed for sport in the arenas.

During the Second Exile, we will move from locality to locality in a continuous dispersion wandering (just as we did for an extra 38 years in the wilderness because of our lack of trust) from nation to nation. Our ways, our observance of the Torah will be adulterated by the ways of the nations amongst whom we have been Exiled, and many of us will be lost to the religions of these nations. We will be driven on from nation to nation due to persecutions and massacres that will almost wipe us out, as has been the case all throughout the Second Exile. And the reason for such heavy persecution during the second Exile?

If you shall not keep to all the words of this Torah, those written in this book; to revere this honoured and awesome name, YHWH your God. (Deut. 28:58)

All prophesised by Moses 1,527 years before the destruction of the Second Temple!