

# Torah Weekly

ת"ב

August 27- September 2,  
2023

10-16 Elul, 5783

Torah: Ki Tavo:  
Deuteronomy 26:1 - 29:8  
Haftorah: Isaiah 60:1-22

PARSHAT KI TAVO

## Calendars

We have Jewish Calendars. If you would like one, please send us a letter and we will send you one, or ask the Rabbi/Chaplain to contact us.

## Family Programs

Do you have family on the outside struggling? Please contact or have them contact our office to learn more about our family programs. You and they are not alone, we are here to help.

## Grape Juice & Matzah

We offer free Grape Juice and Matzah for you to be able to make the blessings every Shabbos. Please have your chaplain / Rabbi contact us to enroll (available to all prisons).

## Celebrating the Mission Statement

There are many Biblical commandments regarding produce grown in the Land of Israel, including setting aside tithings for the Levites and the poor that add up to almost 20 percent of a farmer's produce. Yet no other produce-related commandment was carried out with as much fanfare as the *bikkurim*, the injunction to bring the first fruits of the harvest to the Temple. In addition to travelling to the Temple with the fruit offering, the farmer proclaims a very specific declaration of thanksgiving to G-d. The declaration begins with the description of events in Jewish history, going back to the story of Jacob, then the slavery and Exodus from Egypt, and entering the Promised Land. It concludes with the farmer's declaration that he is offering the first fruits as a gift to G-d.

In addition to the declaration, the Mishnah describes the details of the procession through which the baskets of fruit were carried to Jerusalem:

A bull would go before them and its horns would be plated with gold and it would have an olive wreath around its head. The flute would play before them until they got close to Jerusalem. Once they got close to Jerusalem, they would send ahead of them [a messenger] and adorned their *bikkurim*. The overseers and the officers and the treasurers would go out to greet them; in accordance with the stature of those coming in would they go out. All the artisans of Jerusalem

would stand before them and greet them, "Our brothers from so-and-so, come in peace!" The flute would continue playing before them until they arrived at the Temple Mount. Once they arrived at the Temple Mount, even Agripas the King would carry his basket on his shoulder and enter until he reached the courtyard. Once they got to the courtyard, the Levites would speak in song (Psalms 30:2), "I will extol you, O L-rd, because you have raised me and not allowed my enemies to rejoice over me."

Why was the commandment to bring the fruit accompanied with this great ceremony and a detailed declaration? After all, it was not the largest gift that the farmer was required to give, as the commandments of the tithings far surpassed the value of the few first fruits brought as *bikkurim*. What was so unique about *bikkurim* that the Torah sees it as the culmination and high point of all the Jewish trials and tribulations, going all the way back to our Patriarch Jacob?

Bringing *bikkurim* was more than the Jewish farmer's token of appreciation to G-d for the blessings of the harvest. In fact, the *bikkurim* were a symbol of the mission statement of the People of Israel. While many spiritual seekers choose to abandon the confines of the material world in order to transcend, the Torah teaches us that the purpose of creation is not to escape physicality but to sanctify it, not to abandon the work in the farm and the orchard, but to bring its first fruits to G-d.

What is the purpose of the Jewish people? What is the purpose of all the ups and downs, challenges and triumphs of Jewish history? It is all in order that the Jewish people engage in the world and imbue it with spirituality. We take the first fruits of our field, the fruits of all our effort and labor, and bring them to Jerusalem, using the physical fruit to create a spiritual experience of joy and connection with G-d.

This is not the first time the fruits of the Land of Israel take a place of prominence in the Biblical narrative. When the spies that Moses dispatched to scout the Land of Israel returned to the people with a negative report, they displayed the extraordinarily large fruit of the land, in order to convince the people that they would be unable to conquer the land, "just as its fruit are extraordinary, so too its people are extraordinary." Chassidic philosophy teaches that the spies also presented a spiritual argument against entering the land. They argued that the fruit, and all the effort needed for its cultivation, would distract them from the service of G-d. The material bounty, argued the spies, would pull them away from spirituality. Yet the spies were wrong. As Jews, we are not afraid of abundance; we sanctify it and use it to intensify our spiritual service. Thus, the farmer who takes the *bikkurim* to Jerusalem in a celebratory procession is doing more than offering gratitude. He is embodying the Jewish mission on earth. He is personifying all

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**ALEPH  
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that Judaism teaches. He is sanctifying the mundane and elevating materialism. He is bringing his first fruits to Jerusalem.

By Rabbi Menachem Feldman

## Forewarning

It stands out very prominently in this week's Torah reading: fifty-five consecutive verses of nightmarish misery and torture, all destined to befall the Jewish people when they will be exiled from their land because of their sins. Many of the curses are so appalling that they are difficult to read. Indeed, the *Baal Koreh* (public reader of the [Torah](#) in the synagogue) is expected to read these verses quickly and in a quieter voice than usual. Astoundingly, these maledictions are included in Moses' parting words to the nation he loved so much, whom he lovingly shepherded for forty difficult years.

Some questions don't need to be asked – they jump out at you. Even if G-d intended to bring all these punishments on His people, what is the purpose in describing them in the Torah in such gruesome detail? Furthermore, why does Moses use only fourteen verses to describe the rewards and blessings which [G-d](#) will shower upon us when we will obey His commandments – less than a third of the verses used to describe the maledictions?!

Sadly, every one of these dreadful prophecies has come to pass. Indeed, if these verses wouldn't be part of the Torah, they could be mistaken for a Holocaust memoir written by a concentration camp survivor: "You will serve your enemies, whom the L-rd will send against you, [when you are] in famine, thirst, destitution, and lacking everything... And your life will hang in suspense before you. You will be in fear night and day, and you will not believe in your life. In the morning, you will say, 'If only it were already evening!' and in the evening, you will say, 'If only it were already morning!'..."

After experiencing such horrors it is only natural to ask, "Where was G-d?" and, "If there really is a G-d, how could He allow the inhumanity and cruelty of the Holocaust?" No one questions the source of our blessings, but after enduring excruciating pain, people begin to have doubts. Perhaps this is why all the suffering is so vividly portrayed in the Torah. How can the Holocaust be used to deny G-d's existence when G-d Himself informed us that this event will occur? This is not to say that we can possibly understand the reasons for our nation's tormented history, but we do know that it is all from G-d – and therefore ultimately for our good.

It seems to me that Moses is doing much more than informing us of the troubles which we will experience, he is telling us not to lose our faith because of them. Reading this week's Torah portion and seeing how it has actually all come to pass offers us a measure of hope. It strengthens our belief that we will also certainly see the realization of the conclusion of this prophecy (in next week's Torah portion): "The L-rd, your G-d, will bring back your exiles, and He will have mercy upon you... Even if your exiles are at the end of the heavens, the L-rd, your G-d, will gather you from there... And the L-rd, your G-d, will place all these curses upon your enemies and upon your adversaries who pursued you."

By Rabbi Naftali Silberberg

## T.N. JEWISH HISTORY

**Sunday, August 27, 2023 --- 10 Elul, 5783**

**Noah Dispatches Raven (2105 BCE)**

On the 10<sup>th</sup> of Elul of the year 1656 from creation (2105 BCE), as the [Great Flood](#) neared its end, Noah opened the window of the Ark and dispatched a raven to determine if the flood waters had begun to recede (Genesis 8:1; Rashi).

**Monday, August 28, 2023 --- 11 Elul, 5783**

**Completion of Beit Yosef (1542)**

In 1522, [Rabbi Yosef Caro](#) started writing the *Beit Yosef*, his famous commentary on the *Arba Turim*, [Yaakov Ben Asher's](#) comprehensive Halachic code. He started writing this commentary in Adrianople, Turkey, and continued for the next twenty years, during which time he relocated to Safed, Israel. He completed the monumental work on the 11th of Elul. It took another ten years for the writings to be published.

**Rashab's marriage (1875)**

Marriage of the fifth Rebbe of Chabad-Lubavitch, Rabbi [Sholom DovBer Schneersohn](#) ("Rashab", 1860-1920), to Rebbetzin Shterna Sarah Schneerson (1860-1942).

**Tuesday, August 29, 2023 --- 12 Elul, 5783**

**Sixth Lubavitcher Rebbe visits US (1929)**

On the 12th of Elul (September 16) of 1929, two years after escaping a [death sentence](#) imposed upon him by the Russian Communist regime and his subsequent departure from that country, the sixth Lubavitcher Rebbe, [Rabbi Yosef Yitzchak Schneersohn](#), arrived in New York for a ten-month tour of the United States. In the course of his stay the Rebbe visited the Jewish communities in New York, Philadelphia, Baltimore, Chicago, Detroit, Milwaukee, St. Louis, Boston and several other communities, and was received by President Hoover at the White House. The purpose of the Rebbe's visit was twofold: a) to bring the plight of Russian Jewry to the attention of the American Jewish community and raise funds for the Rebbe's efforts on its behalf; b) to improve the state of *Yiddishkeit* (Torah-true Judaism) in America and strengthen the ties of the American Chabad-Chassidic community with the Rebbe. The Rebbe also wished to explore the possibility of settling in the U.S. and establishing the headquarters of Chabad there; though he did not decide to do so at that time, his 1929 visit laid the foundations for his move to New York in 1940 and the revolutionary changes he wrought in American Jewish life.

Passing of R. Simcha Bunim of Peshis'cha (1827)

R. Simcha Bunim of Peshis'cha (1765–1827) was a disciple of R. Yaakov Yitzchak Horowitz, the "Seer of Lublin" (see entry for 9 Menachem Av), and of R. Yaakov Yitzchak, the "Holy Jew" of Peshis'cha, whom he succeeded as rebbe. His major disciples included [R. Menachem Mendel of Kotzk](#) and the first Rebbe of Ger, R. Yitzchak Meir Alter.

**Friday, September 1, 2023 --- 15 Elul, 5783**

**Tomchei Temimim founded (1897)**

The Yeshiva "Tomchei Temimim Lubavitch", the first to integrate the "revealed" part of Torah (Talmud and Halachah) with the [esoteric teachings of Chassidism](#) in a formal study program, was on this date founded by the fifth Lubavitcher Rebbe, [Rabbi Sholom DovBer Schneersohn](#).