

YESHIVA WEEKLY

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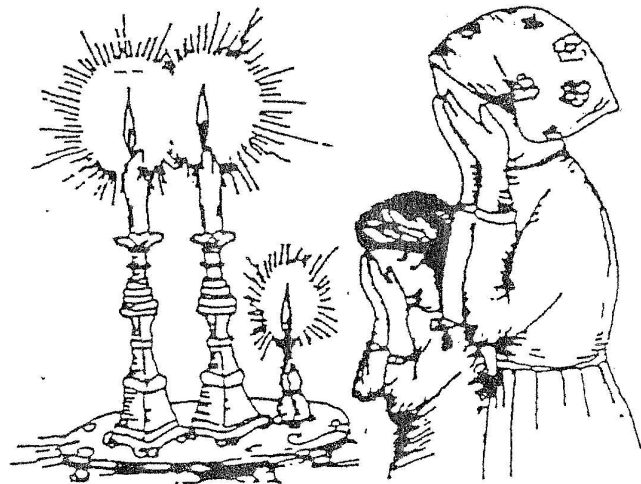
18 Elul, 5770

PARSHAS KI SOVO

Candle Lighting Schedule:
Friday, August 27 7:09 p.m.

Shabbos Ends:
8:09 p.m.

להדליק נר
של שבת קודש



פרשת כי תבא

The Parsha is the seventh of the eleven Torah portions in Devarim, the fifth Book of Moses. Here, Moses tells the second generation of Israelites, who are to cross the Jordan and take possession of the Promised Land after he is gone, what they must know and remember: commandments (mitzvos) to keep in the Holy Land, and above all, the awareness and attitude to the Al-mighty and His Torah that they must have to merit His protection. The Parsha opens with bikurim, "first fruits: Of the seven kinds of earth-grown food for which the Land was praised, a farmer was to gather in a basket the first produce to ripen in his field, to bring it to the Temple in Jerusalem in festive celebration. There the farmer sets it down before a Kohen, recites a text thanking G-d for the people's miraculous past and for its fertile land, that produced the bikurim; and he gives them to the Kohen. Next, we have the words to be recited in a third year, when a person is finished with all the tithes (ma'aser) that he had to give in the three year period.

Moses now exhorts us that "this day the L-rd your G-d commands you to obey the Torah's laws with all your heart and soul"---as though we receive this commandment from Him anew, fresh, every day. Only so does our vital bond with the Al-mighty as His people, under His care, continue strong. Next: once across the Jordan, the people are to set up on Mount Ebal (Eyval) twelve huge stones coated with white plaster, and the Torah is to be inscribed on them. On this Mount Ebal six tribes are to stand, and six on the opposite Mount Gerizim. Standing below, between them, the Kohanim are to pronounce blessings for those who will obey certain vital moral laws, and maledictions for any who will violate them. Moses then foresees powerful blessings for heeding the Al-mighty's commandments; and "the other side of the coin" follows: predictions of dire, horrendous punishment for blatant disobedience—to drive home that this is a core part of our covenant, our pact with the Al-mighty. At the Parsha's end Moses reminds the people of the amazing things that they themselves saw, done for them by the Al-mighty ---compelling reasons for keeping the Torah.

The invocation prescribed by the Torah over the offering of first fruits (Bikurim) in the Beis Hamikdash is punctuated by the words "and now behold I have brought" The Midrash, probing beneath these seemingly superfluous words, finds a particular significance in each: And "now"--- immediately; "behold" ----with happiness: "I have brought"-----of my own-----The Shaarei Chaim sees this as a formulation of the necessary conditions for the proper performance of a mitzvah. A mitzvah must be done now, as soon as it presents itself---without delay. A mitzvah must be performed with happiness, with a joy proceeding from a consciousness of its sublimity; and, finally, a mitzvah must be one's own, the expression of one's deepest most intimate self.

Of course, we all "do mitzvos"; but what a glorious transformation would our mitzvos undergo, if, instead of awaiting "our pleasure," they were swept up by us as soon as they made their appearance, and carried off with all the zest and eagerness of a lover approaching his beloved; with all of his joy, with all of his heart and soul.

We must give of ourselves to a mitzvah---and it will not do to give the residue of the wine-press. We must give the choicest, the finest, the very first fruits of all our faculties. Only then will we have offered upon the altar of G-d's service the loving commitment that He really desires.

What opportunity could be more ideal than the approach of a New Year for a new "approach" to our Father in Heaven, bearing in our arms as we draw near to His presence the very first and finest of all a Jew's fruits---his mitzvos

The focal point of this Parsha is the long detailed list of tragedies that will befall the Jewish people when they neglect the commandments and lose Hashem's special protection. The Vilna Gaon wrote, over 200 years ago, that Parshas Beraishis corresponds to the first millennium, the rest of that book to the second, the book of Shemos to the third, Vayikra to the fourth, Bamidbar to the fifth and Devarim to the sixth. Each Parsha in Devarim corresponds to a century. Thus, Ki Sovo, the seventh Parsha, corresponds to the seventh century in the sixth millennium, that is the 5600's Since this parsha is filled with terrible tragedies he wrote that by the end of the 5600's there would be a terrible tragedy for the Jewish people. 5699 was 1939, and beginning of WWII.

The Sidrah concludes, "Observe, therefore, the words of this covenant, and do them, so that you will prosper in all that you do".

HIGHLIGHTS FROM THE SIDRAH KI SOVO

Bikurim

The Sidrah Ki Solvo begins with the verse "And it shall be when you come into the land, which HaShem, your G-d, has given you as an inheritance"---introduces the Mitzvos of Bikurim---the "first ripened fruits." This is the Mitzvah that required all Jewish farmers and fruit growers in the Land of Israel (including the areas that are Syria and the eastern bank of the Jordan River) to bring some of the first ripened fruits to the Beth Hamikdosh in Jerusalem as a thanks-offering to G-d for the plentiful harvest. Only the seven kinds with which the Land of Israel was praised were subject to the law of Bikurim. These are: "wheat, barley, grapes, figs, pomegranates, olives and dates. The Bikurim were given to the kohanim on duty, after the farmer, or fruit grower recited the following beautiful prayer:

"An Aramean (Laban) threatened to destroy my Father (Jacob). (Subsequently, Jacob) went down into Egypt, and lived as a stranger there, few in number. And he became there a great, mighty and numerous nation. And the Egyptians treated us wickedly, and oppressed us, and laid upon us hard bondage. And we cried unto HaShem, the G-d of our Fathers, and HaShem heard our voice, and saw our pain, and our toil, and our oppression. Then HaShem brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand, and with an outstretched arm, and with awesome revelation, and with signs and with wonders. And He brought us into this place, and has given us this land, a land flowing with milk and honey. And now, here I have brought the first of the fruit of the land, which You, HaShem, have given me".

In olden days, when the Beth Hamikdosh was in existence, the bringing of the Bikurim was a very joyous occasion. The first fruits were carried in beautifully decorated baskets, and streams of pilgrims joined on the way to Jerusalem, singing and dancing to the accompaniment of flutes and other musical instruments. Needless to say, the bringing of the Bikurim, and the recital of the said prayer in the House of G-d deeply impressed the Bikurim bringers with G-d's goodness to His people; how He protected our Father Jacob from the designs of Laban, how He brought out our people from Egyptian bondage, and fulfilled His promise, giving us the Holy Land, a land flowing with milk and honey, as an everlasting inheritance.

Though the Mitzvah of Bikurim has been suspended since the destruction of the Beth Hamikdosh, and will be renewed again only after the Beth Hamikdosh will be rebuilt by Moshiach Tzidkeinu, we are nevertheless inspired just by reading in the Torah about it, and learning all about it in the Talmud. Incidentally, a whole Talmudic tractate---Bikurim---is devoted to this subject.

VIDDUY MA'ASER

The next section of the Sidrah has to do with the distribution of the three tithes and the verbal acknowledgement (vidduy) of having complied with Divine precepts relating to them.

The First Ma'aser (Ma'aser Rishon) was a tenth of the produce due to the Levites, who along with the Kohanim, were the Divine servants and teachers of the people. They were not given a share in the land, for they had to devote their full time to spiritual matters. Instead, there were certain contributions which the people were obligated to make from the produce of the land in support of the landless and the poor. The first ma'aser (one tenth of the produce) belonged to the Leviim, and before it was set aside, no farmer was permitted to enjoy the rest of the produce. This was an annual contribution

At the same time there was a Second Ma'aser (Ma'aser Sheni), which belonged to the owner, but he had to take it to Jerusalem, where he and his family enjoyed it. This Ma'aser could also be redeemed for money, which had to be taken to Jerusalem, and spent on food and beverages to be consumed there.

The above---First and Second Ma'aser--- was to be observed in each of the first two years after Shemittah. On the third year, there was a change: instead of Ma'aser Sheni there was Ma'aser Oni---the

"tithes of the poor." It was to be given to the orphans, widows, and other poor and needy persons. In other words, two ma'asers were to be given away, Ma'aser Rishon and Ma'aser Oni. The third year was also the year of Biur (removal), when the landowner had to remove all his tithes from his house that had not been disposed of as required, for this was the time to pay all his arrears. This was followed by making a solemn declaration and acknowledgment (vidduy) in the fourth year---in the Beth Hamikdosh, on the last day of Pesach.

The above procedure in the first three years (after Shemittah) was repeated in the next three years, with the vidduy being recited on the Seventh Year, the Year of Shemittah.

The Vidduy Ma'aser, which could be recited in any language (not necessarily in the holy tongue) was as follows:

"I have removed the holy things (ma'asros) from my house, and also have given them to the Levite, and to the stranger, and to the fatherless and to the widow, according to all Your commandments which You have commanded me; I have not transgressed any of Your commandments, neither have I forgotten them...Look forth from Your holy habitation from Heaven, and bless Your people Israel, and the land which You have given us, as you vowed to our Fathers, a land flowing with milk and honey."

This Mitzvah, like Bikurim, applies only in the time of the Beth Hamikdosh, and the lesson and inspiration that we derive from both these Mitzvos is similar. Incidentally, while there is no obligation now to give ma'aser from the produce of the land, it is a Mitzvah to give ma'aser---at least 10% ---of our net income for Tzedockah.

PLEDGES AND WARNINGS

Further on, Moshe Rabbeinu reaffirms the eternal bond between the Jewish people and HaShem: The Jewish people have accepted HaShem to be their G-d, to walk in His ways, keep His statutes, and obey His commandments; and HaShem, on His part, declared the Jewish people to be "His own treasure" and a "Holy Nation."

Then Moshe instructed the people that after crossing the Jordan into the Promised Land they should erect twelve large stones at the foot of Mount Ebal (Eival), upon which all the Torah was to be inscribed. This was to be one of the first concrete acts upon entering the land, and it was to impress upon them again their commitment to the Torah. Following this there was to be a solemn assembly of all the people in the valley between Mount Grizim and Mount Ebal. Representatives of six tribes would be stationed on Mount Gerizim, and representatives of the other six tribes would be stationed on Mount Ebal, with the Holy Ark in between, surrounded by the Kohanim and Leviim. Then, the Levites, were to pronounce blessings upon those who obey the Torah, and curses upon those who disobeyed the Torah. Altogether twelve blessings and curses were to be pronounced alternately, with the people responding "Amen" each time.

Most of the rest of the Sidrah is taken up with the Tochachah, "Admonition", similar to the one in the Sidrah Bechukosai (the last of the Book of Vayikra). It begins with the words, "And it shall come to pass if you will obey diligently the voice of HaShem, your G-d, to observe and do all His commandments ..." then follow the many Divine blessings enumerated there. On the other hand, it continues, "if you will not listen to the voice of HaShem your G-d, to observe and do all his commandments and statutes.." then follow the awful consequences of disobedience to the will of G-d in all terrifying detail.

The Tochachah is concluded: *"These are the words of the Covenant which HaShem commanded Moshe to make with the children of Israel in the land of Moab, besides the Covenant which he made with them in Horeb"*

THE HAPHTORAH OF KI SOVO

The Sidrah begins with the law of Bikurim---the first fruits offered in the Beth Hamikdosh as a thanksgiving to G-d. It was accompanied by a beautiful prayer, thanking G-d for His favor in redeeming Israel from Egypt, and bringing the people to the "land flowing with milk and honey."

The Haphtorah continues with the theme of the Haphtorahs of Consolation, describing further the glories of Israel after the Complete Redemption. In contrast to the stern warning of the Toiachah (Admonition) contained in the Sidrah, the Haphtorah paints a glowing picture of Israel's future. The world at large will still be in deep darkness, the darkness that comes from ignorance of G-d. But the light that will shine forth from Israel will be all the brighter.

"Arise, shine, for thy light has come, and the glory of the Lord has risen upon thee".

" For, behold, darkness shall cover the earth.....but upon thee the Lord will shine forth."

"And nations shall walk by thy light..."

"Blessed art thou in the city, and blessed art thou in the field."

Rabbi Yitzchak said, "Blessed art thou in the city" ---because of the Mitzvos which you do in the city, such as challah, tzitzis, succah, lighting the candles before Shabbos, etc. "And blessed art thou in the field" --- because of the Mitzvos which you do in the field, such as leaving for the poor fallen ears of crops (leket), forgotten sheaves (shikchah), and a corner of the field (peah).

* * *

"Blessed art thou at thy coming, and blessed art thou at thy going."

This means: Blessed art thou at thy coming into the world and at thy leaving this world.

Said Rabbi Berechiah, It is written, There is a time to be born, and a time to die. Don't we know that there is a time when one is born and a time when he passes on? But the meaning of this is; Happy is the man whose time of death is as his time of birth, that is to say, when he is as free from sin at his death as he was free of sin at birth. That is the meaning of Blessed art thou at they coming and blessed art thou at thy going.

* * *

"G-d will open unto thee His good treasure, the heaven, to give the rain of thy land in its season."

Said Rabbi Jonathan: Three keys (to three locked treasures) are in the sole possession of G-d, which no creature or angel can unlock, but G-d alone. These are: the key of Resurrection (bringing the dead back to life); the key to bless the childless with children; and the key of rain.

Another explanation: G-d will open unto thee....

G-d said to the children of Israel: My children, all the blessings that come to the world, come for your sake and in your merits. The dew comes because of you, as it is written, "And G-d shall give unto thee of the dew of heaven"; the rain comes for your sake, as it is written, "G-d will open unto thee His good treasure (above); and so does peace come to the world for your meris, as it is written, "And He shall give thee peace."

* * *

"Cursed be he who dishonors his father or mother."

A person who speaks insolently to his parents or raises his voice to them in anger, falls into this category. The same applies to a person who speaks loшон hora against his parents.

When moving to a new house, Rabbi Yehoshua Leib Diskin stood near the person carrying two boxes of written pages and kept repeating to him that he must be very careful not to switch the order of the boxes. After Rabbi Diskin reiterated his request a number of times, the mover asked him what difference it made which box was on top.

"The top box contains the Torah writings of my father, the lower box contains my own," was the reply. "It is not proper that the writings of my father should be beneath mine even for a short while."

THE MONTH OF ELUL IN JEWISH HISTORY

The 25th day of Elul was actually the day when G-d began creating the world in six days, and completed it on the sixth day, when man (Adam) was created. The sixth day of Creation is the first day of Tishrei---Rosh Hashanah.

The 29th of Elul is Erev Rosh Hashanah, the day before Rosh Hashanah. Since the days of Ezra the Scribe, the month of Elul was never enlarged by a 30th day, as in the case of certain other months. Thus, the month of Elul always has 29 days.

There are twelve months in the year and there are twelve Tribes which make up our people Israel, founded by the twelve sons of our Patriarch Jacob. Each month "belongs" to one of the Tribes. The month of Elul belongs to the Tribe of Zebulun, following the month of Av which belongs to Issachar. Now Issachar and Zebulun had a "pact" whereby Issachar devoted himself to the study of the Torah, while Zebulun spent most of the time doing business to support both of them. For this, Zebulun shared in the Torah of Issachar, and was especially blessed with success in his business. The 15th day of Av used to be a special day of celebration for Torah scholars, as the nights were then becoming visibly longer and more time could be devoted to the study of the Torah at night. But the month of Elul was a signal for all supporters of the Torah scholars and institutions to increase their support, too. The month of Elul is therefore especially timely for Tzedockah, and for those who do business with a view to being able to give Tzedockah, and support the institutions of Torah learning in particular.

And, in the merit of Torah and Tzedockah, all Jews are blessed with a Happy New Year.

THE MIRROR

The 18th of Elul is the birthday of Rabbi Israel Ba'al Shem Tov (5458-1698), as well as the birthday of Rabbi Schneur Zalman, the first Lubavitcher Rebbe (5505-1745). In this connection we bring you the following story.

Once upon a time, Rabbi Schneur Zalman, the saintly author of the Tanya, passed through a small town on one of his visits to the various communities of his followers. When he arrived in the town, he found it agog with excitement, for a fire had broken out in one of the houses, and the whole town was in danger of going up in flames.

Near that town there was an army camp, and when the fire was at its height, the soldiers were ordered to help put out the fire. Together with the townspeople they had formed a human chain from the river to the fire, passing buckets of water from hand to hand to pour over the burning house. But no matter how much water was poured on the fire, the fire seemed to burn completely out of control. A fierce wind was blowing, fanning the flames and sending sparks in all directions. It seemed only a matter of minutes before all the surrounding wooden houses would go up in flames, leaving a shambles of the whole town.

Rabbi Schneur Zalman went to the burning house. He stood there, resting on his walking staff for a few minutes, gazing intently upon the burning flames. Suddenly the wind calmed down and the fire began to subside, too. In a matter of minutes the fire was put out completely, and the people breathed a sigh of relief. "It's a miracle!" they said.

When the soldiers returned to camp, their commanding officer congratulated them for their good work. But they said, "We deserve no credit for putting out the fire. A saintly Rabbi came and put out the fire with his burning eyes!"

The captain sent a carriage to bring the Rabbi to him. When Rabbi Schneur Zalman arrived, the captain greeted him respectfully, asked him to sit down, and then put a question to him: Are you, perhaps, the son, or grandson, of a saintly Rabbi Israel, known as the Ba'al Shem Tov?"

"I am indeed his grandson, but in a spiritual sense," Rabbi Schneur Zalman answered, explaining

that he was the disciple of Rabbi Israel Ba'al Shem Tov's disciple. "And since the teachers of the Torah and the Jewish way of life are, in a true sense, the fathers and grandfathers, I consider the Ba'al Shem Tov as my grandfather indeed," Rabbi Schneur Zalman added.

"In that case I am not at all surprised that you are a wonder worker like your grandfather," the captain said, and he went on: "Let me tell you what happened to my father when he met your grandfather.

"My father, who was an army general, was leading his troops in maneuvers near the town of Medziboz. He had left his wife at home expecting a baby, and he was very worried because he had not received any letters from her for a long time. Then, somebody mentioned to him that there lived a saintly man in that town, to whom all secrets were revealed. Why not ask him!

"And so my father sent his adjutant to that saintly Rabbi to make an appointment to see him. But the saintly Rabbi refused to make an appointment to see my father, saying that it was not necessary. My father was not used to being turned down, and he sent his adjutant again. This time my father threatened that he would billet his troops among the Jews of the town and make plenty of trouble for them, if the Ba'al Shem Tov refused to receive him. The Ba'al Shem Tov then invited him to his house.

"At the appointed time, my father, accompanied by his adjutant, came to the Ba'al Shem Tov's house. On entering, he saw the saintly Rabbi through an open door leading into an inner room. The Ba'al Shem Tov was sitting at his table, deeply engrossed in a book. My father was so impressed by the sight of the Ba'al Shem Tov that he felt as if he were about to enter into the presence of royalty. By force of habit he stopped by the mirror hanging on the wall to smooth out his beard and check his uniform. Suddenly a marvelous thing happened. As he looked into the mirror, a road unfolded before his eyes leading to his hometown. The scene shifted quickly, as if he were riding on it. Presently he was in his familiar hometown, and on the street where his house stood. The door opened, and he saw his wife sitting at the writing table, writing a letter to him. He could even read the writing. His wife was telling him that she had given birth to a son, and both of them were well, and hoping he would come home soon. Nearby was a cot, and in it a baby boy was sleeping quietly....

The scene vanished, and my father saw himself staring at his own face, which was pale and frightened, so that he could hardly recognize himself. He managed to murmur his thanks to the saintly Rabbi, and then hastily withdrew.

"When he returned to his quarters, the letter from his wife was waiting for him. He recognized it, for he had already seen it in that wonderful mirror.

"My father kept a diary, and he wrote down in it that wonderful experience. The diary is now in my possession, for I am the boy who was in the cot whom my father saw in the mirror."

The captain brought out the leather-bound diary and showed it to Rabbi Schneur Zalman.