

Torah Talk—מאמרי תורה



The Parasha Letter of The Jewish Primary Day School of the Nation's Capital

Parashat Ki Tavo
September 5, 2015

פרשת כי תבוא
כ"א באלול תשע"ה

Torah Reading: *Devarim* (Deuteronomy) 26:1-29:8

The advent of the new school year is a good time to review the purpose and use of *Torah Talk*. Each week, in preparation for Shabbat, you will receive a synopsis of the weekly *parasha* (Torah portion), a discussion of the portion geared towards adults, and a selection of age-appropriate questions which you can use as a springboard for a Torah discussion with your children. You can read through *Torah Talk* with your child(ren) and explain to them in developmentally appropriate language anything they do not understand in the *Dvar Torah*.

All 3rd through 6th graders will learn the *parasha* together at *tefilah* (prayer) on Monday mornings, taught each week by a member of the Judaic Studies staff or one of the local congregational rabbis. They will hear the same concepts that you see in adult form in these pages. Children and their parents can thus learn the *parasha* together. The students will have already heard the material once, and sharing the *Torah Talk* with them will reinforce the ideas that they have already learned.

2nd graders will continue to learn the *parasha* with their Judaic Studies teachers in their classrooms, and 1st graders will continue to learn Torah through an exploration of characters in the various books of the Torah. Pre-Kindergarteners and Kindergarteners do not learn the weekly portion at school; all children can certainly be included in whatever discussions you have on the *parasha*.

We hope you will find this material enlightening and helpful and that you will explore with your family the wealth of concepts and values found within the Torah and the teachings of our Sages.

In this week's *parasha*, Moshe instructs *Bnei Yisrael* (the Israelites) on the first fruit offering and then elaborates on the terms of the covenant by listing the blessings for keeping the commandments and the punishments for disobeying them.

Many people may recognize the first part of the statement about the first fruit offering, as it serves as the basis for the *maggid* section of the *Pesach Seder*. It reads (26:5-10):

אֲרָמִי אֲבִד אָבִי, וַיֵּרֶד מִצְרַיִם, וַיִּגְרֶשׁ שָׁם בְּמַתִּי מֵעֵץ; וַיְהִי-שָׁם, לְגוֹי גָדוֹל
עָצוּם וְרָב. וַיִּרְעוּ אֹתָנוּ הַמִּצְרַיִם, וַיַּעֲנוּנוּ; וַיִּתְּנוּ עָלֵינוּ, עֲבֹדָה קָשָׁה. ז'
וַנִּצְעַק, אֶל-ה' אֱלֹהֵי אֲבוֹתֵינוּ; וַיִּשְׁמַע ה' אֶת-קֹלָנוּ, וַיִּרְא אֶת-עַנְיָנוּ וְאֶת-
עֲמָלָנוּ וְאֶת-לַחֲצֵנוּ. ח וַיּוֹצֵאֵנוּ ה', מִמִּצְרַיִם, בְּיָד חֲזָקָה וּבְזֹרֶעַ נְטוּיָה,
וּבְמַרְא גְדֹל--וּבְאֹתוֹת, וּבְמִפְתִּיּוֹת. ט וַיְבִיאֵנוּ, אֶל-הַמָּקוֹם הַזֶּה; וַיִּתֵּן-לָנוּ
אֶת-הָאָרֶץ הַזֹּאת, אֶרֶץ זָבַת חֶלֶב וּדְבַשׁ. י וְעַתָּה, הִנֵּה הֵבִאתִי אֶת-רֵאשִׁית
פְּרִי הָאֲדָמָה, אֲשֶׁר-נָתַתָּה לִּי, ה';

“A wandering Aramean was my father, and he went down into Egypt, and sojourned there, few in number; and he became there a nation, great, mighty, and populous. **6** The Egyptians dealt ill with us, and afflicted us, and laid upon us hard bondage. **7** We cried to Hashem, the God of our ancestors, and Hashem heard our voice, and saw our affliction, and our toil, and our oppression. **8** Hashem brought us forth out of Egypt with a mighty hand, and with an outstretched arm, and with great terribleness, and with signs, and with wonders. **9** Hashem has brought us into this place, and has given us this land, a land flowing with milk and honey. **10** And now, behold, I have brought the first of the fruit of the land, which You, Hashem, have given me.”

You may notice that the *haggadah* omits the last two verses, and that many *haggadot* translate the beginning as “An Aramean (Laban) tried to kill my father.” The *Ba'al Haggadah*, the unknown redactor of the *Seder* text, changed both the context and word usage from its original presentation in the Biblical text. We can only surmise why he chose to omit the last two verses.

One possible reason is that the *Pesach Seder* commemorates the beginning of the journey of the Jewish people, both literally and figuratively. On Pesach night, we celebrate the Exodus from Egypt. Bnei Yisrael still had 40 difficult years ahead of them in the wilderness before they would see and enter the Holy Land. To finish

the section above by reading the last two verses at the Seder would be to short-circuit the process and to, if you will, read the last page of the book first, before “traveling with the Bnei Yisrael” through the wilderness.

Figuratively, the Exodus began what has so far been a 3300 year odyssey, taking our people from land to land, from culture to culture, spreading out geographically, theologically, and ritually and creating a tapestry of Jewish practices and beliefs.

For that reason, it is interesting that the two final verses are omitted. Our story is still playing out day after day, year after year, and we cannot even imagine what the next chapter might look like. We have miles and years to travel before the end of the story, so here is to our journey together!

Shabbat Shalom.

For Discussion:

- What other reasons might there be for the *Ba'al Haggadah* leaving off the last two verses?
- What does “a land flowing with milk and honey” look like? What do you think this phrase means?
- What is the country of origin of your ancestors? When did they come to America and from where?