



פרשת כי תבוא  
Parshat Ki Tavo

Ashreinu | אשרינו

ENHANCING YOUR STUDY OF THE WEEKLY TORAH PORTION



FINDING MEANING IN MITZVOT

RABBI CHAIM LANNER

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HANNAH SHAPIRO ('23)

PENINA KAHANE ('22)

NAOMI REICHENBERG ('22)

ADAM DENNIS ('21)

About 300 hundred years ago on a Sunday morning in a little town in Europe, the men of the community woke up early to daven shacharit in shul. Each wore his talit

and tefillin while davening to Hashem. Suddenly, government officials stormed into the shul, started beating up congregants and destroying the entire shul, including the Sifrei Torah that were in the *aron kodesh*. After these barbarians left the shul, a group of the daveners approached the rabbi of the community with the following question: "Rabbi, we are very confused. We all remember you teaching us the pasuk in Parshat Ki Tavo that says:

וְרָאוּ כָּל עַמֵּי הָאָרֶץ כִּי שָׁם הָיָה נִקְרָא עָלֶיךָ וַיִּרְאוּ מִמֶּךָ

'The nations of the world will see that the name of Hashem is upon you and they will revere you' (Devarim 28:10). And you shared with us the Talmud's statement which explains that this pasuk is referring to a time when the Jews are wearing their tefillin on their heads. So how is it then, that at the moment that we were all wearing our tefillin on our heads, these people could come in here and do what they did to us? Please explain it to us, Rabbi."

The Rabbi looked at them and explained the simple answer. "Let's read that line in the Talmud again together," he said. "When is it that the nations of the world will revere us? '*Eilu tefilin shebirosh*' — which you translated as, 'When we are wearing tefillin on our heads.' But if that's what the Talmud meant, it would have said '*eilu tefillin she'al harosh*' — 'These are the tefillin ON the head.' Instead, the Talmud says '*eilu tefilin shebirosh*,' 'These are the tefillin IN the head.'

Do you know what that means? It is not enough to go through the robotic motions of simply putting tefillin on our heads, but we need to let the message of the tefillin penetrate INSIDE our heads. We need to let the tefillin become a part of who we are. Only when that happens are we performing the mitzvah of tefillin correctly and will we be worthy of respect from the nations of the world.

This important lesson is true for all mitzvot we set out to do. While simply performing mitzvot is certainly important, internalizing their messages and allowing them to transform us into better people is a necessary step for us to take as well. Let's take, for example, the mitzvah of charity.

We have so many opportunities to give charity. Sometimes there is a knock on our door, sometimes there's an envelope in the mail, and sometimes there's a lady standing on the corner of 441 and Palmetto during a red light. So what do we do if we are in a generous mood? We write out a check or hand the person a few dollars, maybe even just flip them a coin or two, and then we feel pretty good about ourselves, as we should. But the question is: are we internalizing our actions? As a result of my charitable act, am I now a more generous, sensitive, and giving person than I was before? If so, then I have performed the mitzvah to its fullest. If I'm just going through the motions, then a dimension of the mitzvah is still missing and there is room for improvement.

## DO THE RIGHT THING

HANNAH SHAPIRO ('23)

In this week's parsha, Parshat Ki Tavo, it says:

ולא נתן ה' לכם לב לדעת ועינים לראות  
ואזנים לשמע עד היום הזה

“Yet until this day God has not given you a heart to know, eyes to see, and ears to hear” (Devarim 29:3).

Moshe is telling the Jewish people that though they have been an established group of people for 40 years, only now are they opening their hearts,

eyes, and ears to all that God has done for them. He also tells them about the rewards for doing good things, and the punishments for doing bad things. This aforementioned phrase has a deeper meaning as well and can teach us a valuable lesson.

When the pasuk says **לֵב לְדַעַת**, “a knowing heart,” it refers to the way that people treat each other. We can learn from these words that we need to open our hearts not just to God, but also to each other. We have to try to understand what other people are going through, and show compassion towards them. From the words **לְעֵינַיִם לְרִאוֹת**, “eyes to see,” we can learn to pay attention to what is happening in the world around us. The words **לְאָזְנַיִם לְשָׁמֹעַ**, “ears to hear,” show us that we should listen and be attentive to what is happening. We can also learn to listen to others, rather than invalidating each other.

Overall, this pasuk comes to teach us that we should not just watch as the injustices of the world occur. We should stand up for what's right. God allows us to see, hear, and have a knowing heart. We have the ability to recognize when something is wrong or corrupt, and we should do everything in our power to work towards righting those wrongs. When you see or hear something that feels wrong, you should not just take it sitting down. Be mindful of yourself and others. We have to learn to support our fellow humans, and come together to do what is moral and just. Stand up for what you believe in, no matter the cost.

## GIVE IT TIME

PENINA KAHANE ('22)

In the second half of Parshat Ki Tavo, Moshe gives Bnei Yisrael rebuke and tells them what will happen if they go against Hashem's ways. Moshe then continues to tell his people that after 40 years, Hashem has finally given them a mind to understand, ears to hear, and eyes to see:

ולא נתן ה' לכם לב לדעת ועינים לראות ואזנים  
לשמע עד היום הזה

“Yet until this day God has not given you a heart to know, eyes to see, and ears to hear” (Devarim 29:3).

Two questions are asked about this pasuk: Does this mean that Bnei Yisrael did not have minds, ears, and eyes before this day? Also, why is Hashem choosing this day specifically to give these things to them?

The Ibn Ezra explains that throughout the entire book of Bamidbar, Bnei Yisrael constantly complained about everything and kept saying they should have been left in Egypt to die.

יִלְנוּ עַל מֹשֶׁה וְעַל אֶהֱרֹן כָּל בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וַיֹּאמְרוּ אֲלֵהֶם כָּל הָעֵדָה לֹא מָתְנוּ בְּאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם אוּ בַמִּדְבָּר הַזֶּה לֹא מָתְנוּ  
“All the Israelites railed against Moshe and Aaron. “If only we had died in the land of Egypt,” the whole community shouted at them, “or if only we might die in this wilderness!” (Bamidbar 14:2).

The Ibn Ezra explains that on that day, after 40 years, Bnei Yisrael stopped complaining and were able to truly see all the signs that Hashem had been giving to them.

The Bartenura on Pirkei Avot (5:21:7) explains that *בְּן אַרְבָּעִים לְבִינָה* -- “Forty [is the age] for understanding.” Forty years beforehand Bnei Yisrael stood at Har Sinai and accepted the Torah. After forty years of learning, one is fully able to understand what their teacher was trying to teach them. Only on this day are Bnei Yisrael able to clearly understand, see, and hear, Moshe’s teachings. Even in school, we might not always understand the lessons our teachers are trying to convey but that doesn’t mean that we should dismiss what they are saying. One day we will gain the mind, eyes, and ears to finally fully understand. This year especially, let’s make it a point to try to appreciate our teachers’ teachings. Shabbat shalom.



# LOVING HASHEM

NAOMI REICHENBERG ('22)

This week’s parsha starts off by saying,

וְהָיָה כִּי תָבוֹא אֶל הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ נָתַן לְךָ נַחֲלָה וְיִרְשָׁתָהּ וַיִּשְׁבַּת בָּהּ. וְלָקַחְתָּ מִרְאשֵׁית כָּל פְּרִי הָאֲדָמָה

“When you enter the land that Hashem your God is giving you as a heritage, and you possess it and settle in it, you shall take some of every first fruit of the soil...” (Devarim 26:2).

This pasuk is referring to the mitzvah of bringing *bikkurim* to the Beit Hamikdash. As we all know, Hashem is not a physical being, so does Hashem need this fruit from us? What lesson is to be taken from this request of Hashem?

The most common mantra for the month of Elul is *אֲנִי לְדוּדִי וְדוּדִי לִי* -- “I am to my beloved and my beloved is to me.” We often hear this line and do not understand the true meaning: only if I am to my beloved will He be to me. We spend so much time asking where Hashem is in each situation. Where is Hashem during corona? Where is Hashem in my *nisayon*? Why isn’t he helping me? Isn’t he supposed to be here? These questions are all valid, but maybe instead we should be asking ourselves, where we are? Who are we? What are we doing in our power to show Hashem we love him? What are we doing to better ourselves?

In a recent shiur, R’ Ari Bensoussan said, “What is the point of going sightseeing if I have no one to share it with.” Hashem is with us in sightseeing and everything else. In Elul we must remember more than ever that in everything we go through, Hashem is going through it with us. He is a part of each and every experience we go through. Not only does he share in our simcha, but he also shares in our *nisyonot*.

This Elul, we should be asking ourselves, what am I doing for Hashem? It is so fitting that Parshat Ki Tavo falls out during Elul, because Hashem is telling Klal Yisrael, not only do I want you, my

precious *kinderlach*, but I want all of your baggage. Bring me your first fruits. I do not need them in any way, shape, or form, but show Me you care too. Please think of Me and love Me the way that I love you. Let me show you that I care about you and everything you have to offer. Hashem is always with us and is always listening and wants to hear about our *narishkeit* baggage because he loves us. He loves each of us as an only child. This Elul, lets focus on the אָנִי in אָנִי לְדוֹדִי וְדוֹדִי לִי and show Hashem we love Him. May we all be *zoche* to achieve true Ahavat Hashem. Shabbat shalom.

## IT'S A GIFT

ADAM DENNIS ('21)

This week's parsha tells us about the mitzvah to bring our first fruits to the Beit Hamikdash. A mishna in Masechet Bikkurim (3:8) says that the rich would bring their fruits in gold and silver baskets, while the poor would bring their fruits in inexpensive wicker baskets. The Kohanim would then go on to take the fruits and then would only return the gold/silver baskets, and not the wicker baskets of the poor people. Why? This is just another example of the rich getting richer and the poor getting poorer (Bava Kama 92a).

Rav Aharon Bakst gives an answer in the name of his Rebbe, the Alter of Kelm. A pasuk in Mishlei states:

תְּחַנּוּנִים יְדַבֵּר-רָשׁ וְעֲשִׂיר יַעֲנֶה עֲזוֹת

“The poor man speaks beseechingly; The rich man's answer is harsh” (18: 23).

The simple understanding is that the rich are being rude and the pasuk is giving them advice on how to act. However, he suggests that the pasuk is not only giving *mussar* to the rich, but also to the poor; it is telling them to not only just bow down and be lowly, but beseech Hashem with happiness and singing. The reason the wealthy get their baskets back is that we are showing that Hashem doesn't care about materialistic things like gold and silver. The reason the Kohanim keep the wicker baskets is to show the poor person that even though they may think they have nothing to contribute, everything we have to offer to Hashem is a wonderful gift, no matter how much it costs.

Let us all internalize this message and use the abilities that Hashem has given us to serve Him to the fullest. A Guten Shabbos!

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