

Parashat Ki Tavo 5774, 2014

On the Destiny of the Jewish People

Rabbi David Etengoff

Dedicated to the sacred memories of my mother, Miriam Tovah bat Aharon Hakohen, father-in-law, Levi ben Yitzhak, sister-in-law, Ruchama Rivka Sondra bat Yechiel, sister, Shulamit bat Menachem, Chaim Mordechai Hakohen ben Natan Yitzchak, Yehonatan Binyamin ben Mordechai Meir Halevi, Shmuel David ben Moshe Halevy, Avraham Yechezkel ben Yaakov Halevy, and the refuah shlaimah of Yosef Shmuel ben Miriam, Devorah bat Chana, and Yitzhak Akiva ben Malka, and to the safety of our brothers and sisters in Israel.

Our *parasha* begins with the phrase, “*v’hayah ki tavo el ha’aretz,*” (“And it will be **when you come** to the land”). The exact expression, “*ki tavo*” (spelled in full with a *vav*), is found three other times in the Torah, namely, in *Sefer Bereishit* 24:41, 30:33 and 38:16. Let us examine each of these verses in order to ascertain if there are any shared or complementary thematic elements that are introduced by this phrase.

Sefer Bereishit 24:41: This *pasuk* (verse) is a retrospective presentation of the dialogue between Avraham and his unnamed servant, whom the *Midrash* consistently identifies as Eliezer. Herein, Avraham commanded Eliezer to find Yitzhak a wife from his (i.e. Avraham’s) family, and seal that obligation with an oath: “You will then be absolved from my oath, when you come (“*ki tavo*”) to my family, and if they do not give [her] to you, you will be absolved from my oath.” (This and all Bible translations, *The Judaica Press Complete Tanach*) In this instance, “*ki tavo*” signals a major step in the continuation of the Jewish people: Avraham knew beyond a shadow of a doubt that the future of the Jewish people was inextricably interwoven with Yitzhak, and that the monotheistic religious revolution he had begun could only be sustained through the unceasing efforts of his most cherished son. Avraham, the progenitor of our people, had been blessed with Sarah – without whom his goals would have remained merely wistful dreams. He,

therefore, realized that as great as Yitzhak was, he could not reach his full potential alone, and that he needed a beloved life partner to ensure the continuity of the Jewish people. As a result, the search for Yitzhak's wife was prominently punctuated with the term, "*ki tavo*," to alert us to a change in the destiny and future of our people.

Sefer Bereishit 30:33: Six chapters later in the *Bereishit* narrative, we are met with a crucial and life-changing interaction that obtained between *Yaakov Avinu* (our father Jacob) and his deceitful father-in-law, Lavan. With the exception of Benjamin, all of Yaakov's sons, including Yosef, had now been born. At this point, Yaakov clearly recognized that by remaining with Lavan, he was subjecting his household to both spiritual and physical dangers. He realized that in order to protect his faith and family, he would have to leave his father-in-law and all for which he stood. Therefore, he announced his intentions to Lavan who, following the mores of his time, finally asked Yaakov to establish his rightful wages for the many trying years of his devoted and selfless labor. As was to be expected in such an angst and tension-filled encounter, Yaakov needed to be exceptionally forthright and transparent in order to avoid any impression that he was asking for that which was not his. He negotiated an honest and straightforward settlement and then declared to Lavan: "And my righteousness will testify for me at a future date for it will come upon (*ki tavo*) my wages before you. Whatever is not speckled or spotted among the goats or brown among the sheep [shall be counted as] stolen with me." While this initially appears to be nothing other than a business deal, one is struck by the terms "my righteousness" ("*tzidkati*"), "at a future date" ("*b'yom machar*"), and "*ki tavo*." Once again, the term "*ki tavo*" is unmistakably the harbinger of the future of the entire Jewish people, a time when our righteousness, as the servants of the Almighty, will surely be recognized by the entire world.

Sefer Bereishit 38:16: The next *pasuk* is an essential part of one of the most unusual accounts in *Chamisha Chumshei Torah* (The Five Books of the Torah), namely, the physical encounter that transpired between Yehudah and his daughter-in-law, Tamar, who was playing the role of a harlot: “So he turned aside toward her to the road, and he said, ‘Get ready now, I will come to you,’ for he did not know that she was his daughter-in-law, and she said, ‘What will you give me that you should come (*ki tavo*) to me?’” There are a multitude of disturbing elements in this story and many questions that we can ask. Yet, *Midrash Rabbah Bereishit* 85:8 exonerated Yehudah’s behavior in the following fashion:

At first [glance] Yehudah paid her [Tamar] no attention since she covered her face [and was clearly a harlot]. He, therefore, desired to walk away from her. At that moment, however, the Holy One Blessed be He caused the angel that is in charge of desire to say to him: “Yehudah where are you going? From where will kings come forth? From where will the great ones arise?” Therefore, the text immediately states: “So he turned aside toward her to the road.” In other words, this [entire matter] was against his will and not for his benefit. (Translation and brackets my own)

Tamar, as well, was completely vindicated by our Sages and viewed as a consummate *tzedeket* (righteous woman) as the following passage from the *Zohar* (I:158 b) clearly portrays:

There were two women from whom the seed of Yehudah blossomed. There came forth from them King David, King Solomon, and [there will come forth] the *Melech Hamashiach* (the Messiah). These two women were similar to one another, i.e. Tamar and Ruth, for in both cases their first husbands died, and both actively pursued the physical relations [that would eventuate in offspring]. The seed of Yehudah was established (lit. “built”) and perfected by these two [women], **and both acted out of righteous motives**. (Translation, brackets, and parentheses my own)

Once again, “*ki tavo*” heralds a change in the destiny of *Kenneset Yisrael*, the trans-historical entity of the Jewish people, up to and including the coming of *Mashiach*.

Given what we have learned from the preceding narratives, we are now ready to determine if “*ki tavo*” in our *parasha* has the same future-oriented connotation that we have identified until this point. Herein, the direct meaning of the Hebrew text serves as our guide, since the word that

precedes “*ki tavo*” in the first *pasuk* of our *sidrah* (Torah portion) is “*v’hayah*,” a Biblical future tense form of the verb “to be.” In other words, we may legitimately translate our three-word expression as: “In the future, it will be the case when you come.” Come where? “... into the land which the L-rd, your G-d, gives you for an inheritance, and you possess it and settle in it.” Clearly, the phrase, “*ki tavo*,” in our *parasha* reflects the same meaning as in the verses we have analyzed from *Sefer Bereishit*. In a word, *ki tavo* portends transition and change, and speaks to the future and destiny of the Jewish people.

Parashat Ki Tavo is always read before Rosh Hashanah. *Chazal* (Our Sages of blessed memory) instituted this practice because it contains one of the two instances of the *Tochechah*, in this case, 54 verses of frightening and devastating curses that will ensue if we, as a nation, violate Hashem’s *mitzvot*. Beyond a doubt, these terrifying verses should lead nearly everyone to moments of deep introspection and heartfelt contemplation – two constitutive elements of the *teshuvah* (returning to Hashem) process. Hence, it is read before the Day of Judgment.

In my opinion, however, there is another reason why *Chazal* instituted the reading of our *parasha* at this time. It appears to me that this is contained in the very first verse of our Torah portion: “And it will be, when you come (*ki tavo*) into the land which the L-rd, your G-d, gives you for an inheritance, and you possess it and settle in it.” How can we reinterpret this *pasuk* in light of what we now know about the phrase, “*ki tavo*?” I believe Hashem is giving us an incredibly powerful and optimistic message immediately before Rosh Hashanah, when each of us stand in fear and tremble before Him: No matter how far we have strayed from his Torah, no matter how disloyal we may have been, no matter what we have done or failed to do, He will

take us back once again and cradle us in His beneficent “arms” if we but reach out to Him in true and authentic repentance.

May it be that when the Jewish people wholeheartedly return to G-d *b'teshuvah shalaimah* (complete repentance), we will witness the fulfillment of our *pasuk* and the realization of our nation's ultimate destiny under the guiding hand of the *Melech Hamashiach*. With Hashem's help, may this time come soon and in our days. *V'chane yihi ratzon*.

Shabbat Shalom

Past *drashot* may be found at my blog-website: <http://reparashathashavuah.org>

The email list, *b'chasdei Hashem*, has expanded to hundreds of people. I am always happy to add more members to the list. If you have family or friends you would like to have added, please do not hesitate to contact me via email rdb718@gmail.com.

*** My audio *shiurim* for Women on “*Tefilah: Haskafah* and Analysis,” may be found at: <http://tinyurl.com/8hsdpyd>

*** I have posted 164 of **Rabbi Soloveitchik's** English language audio *shiurim* (MP3 format) spanning the years 1958-1984. They are available here: <http://tinyurl.com/82pgvfn>.

** Follow new postings on my Twitter accounts: @theRavZatzal and @Torahtech613.

*** Interested in 21st Century Jewish Education? See my blog and Scoopit.com Pages:

<http://21stcenturyjewisheducation.org>

<http://www.scoop.it/t/educational-technology-yeshiva-edition>

<http://www.scoop.it/t/great-digital-judaic-studies-resources>