

Bringing meaning to life

Parasha with Rabbi Benji Levy

DEVARIM

VAETCHANAN

EKEV

RE'EH

SHOFTIM

KI TEITZEI

KI TAVO

NITZAVIM

VAYELECH

HAAZINU

VZOT
HABRACHA

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KI TAVO DON'T FORGET: INCREASING GOOD IS THE ANTIDOTE TO EVIL

Parashat Ki Tavo begins by listing the steps we should take upon entering our homeland. We must acknowledge the good, give first fruits and tithes, provide for the leaders and teachers and care for the less fortunate. After giving the tithes we are commanded to make a speech, saying, 'I have given to the Levite, proselyte, orphan and widow...I have not transgressed Your commandments and I have not forgotten [*lo shachachtu*].'¹ This is a strange command. When else are we ever commanded to give a speech like this following the performance of a *mitzva*, stating that we have performed it and that we haven't forgotten to perform it? **Surely, if we are announcing that we have successfully performed a *mitzva* then it is obvious that we didn't forget it?**

Rashi explains that the phrase 'I have not forgotten' is actually referring to the requirement to make a blessing upon the

separation of tithes.² However the question remains as the blessing or lack thereof does not actually change the essence or efficacy of the performance of the *mitzva*.

A possible answer is hinted to through the parallel with the final words of the previous *parasha*, 'erase the memory of Amalek from beneath the heavens - do not forget [*lo tishkach*].'³ **Amalek represents absolute evil. It is a nation that preys upon the innocent and weak, and as such is the antithesis of the Jewish vision of helping the needy and the vulnerable.**

The Torah juxtaposes the story of Amalek with the commandment of the tithes, in order to show us that the only way to wipe out the abuse of the less fortunate is for the more fortunate to seek them out and act kindly. The society of Amalek worships power. The Torah, in contrast, constructs a society that

cares for the powerless, the 'Levite, proselyte, orphan and widow'.

Rav Kook states:
The purely righteous: Don't complain about wickedness, they increase righteousness;
don't complain about heresy, they increase faith;
don't complain about ignorance, they increase wisdom.⁴

When we encounter challenging situations in our lives, often our first reaction is to complain and to focus on the negative. This approach, however, can lead us to sink deeper into the problem itself. We become consumed by the issue, and this blurs our ability to deal with it objectively. With a negative perspective, it is extremely difficult to create a positive outcome. Our complaining leads us to become part of the problem rather than a part of its solution.



With all the problems facing our world today, we must realise that the remedy for the world's ills lies in transcending the bad by overcompensating with good, combatting radical hatred with radical love.

Darkness does not become diminished as a result of complaining about it or trying to cover it up, but rather through creating an abundance of light. And this message, as stated by the Torah, is so crucial, that we should all be able to proudly declare: 'I have not forgotten!'

Notes

¹ Deuteronomy 26:13.

² Rashi ad loc.

³ Deuteronomy 25:19.

⁴ Quoted in inside cover of Simcha Raz, *An Angel Among Men: Impressions from the Life of Rav Avraham Yitzchak HaKohen Kook Zt"l* (Urim Publications, 2003).

Parasha Fact:

One is obligated to bring Bikkurim, first fruit offerings, from the seven species that Israel is blessed with: wheat, barley, grapes, figs, pomegranates, olives and dates. The order of this verse is intentional, and also teaches us the order in which we must say a blessing before eating these foods if many of them are before us.

Next week in Nitzavim:

From the age that a child learns to read, he or she is taught that learning Torah is of utmost importance, a paramount value in our lives. The question is, though, whether our Torah education should be viewed as exclusively an 'end' in and of itself, or as a means to an end as well. And if it is indeed, in part, a means, then what is the ultimate purpose? An enigmatic use of the word 'heavens' in the middle of Parashat Nitzavim unexpectedly sheds light on these questions, offering us clarity as to the purpose of life.