

## Am Segolah, A Treasured People

In this week's reading from *Parsahat Ki Tavo* (*Devarim / Deuteronomy 26:1-29:8*), Moshe tells us that the Lord has brought His people out of Egypt with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm; with great terror, signs, and wonders He delivered His people. We are told disobedience to the commandments is punishable since failing to observe the commands is synonymous to breaking the covenant. This poses a problem by reason that we all fall short of the Torah command and have at one time or another been disobedient. (*Note that disobeying either the greater or the lesser, constitutes disobedience to them all. - James 2:10*) If this is the case, what was the point of the Lord giving His Torah to the people? Midrash Tehillim 75, Part 1 tells us, "*When the Holy One blessed be He, sought to give the Torah to Israel, the earth began to quake and totter out of fear that the children of Israel would not, God have mercy, accept the Torah, and that the earth would turn back to emptiness and chaos. But as soon as the children of Israel said, We will do and obey (Shemot / Exodus 24:7), the earth established itself again on its foundation, as is said, I myself established the pillars of it. Selah.*" The idea here is that the world was created for the purpose of the giving of the Torah to Israel. If Israel had refused, the world would have been destroyed. The earth quaked when the Torah was offered to Israel under the interpretation that the world was created for the purpose of man accepting and living according to God's commands. This is consistent with the Apostle Paul's words to the Ephesians saying, *2:10 For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them. (NASB)*

Consistent with this interpretation, in this week's Torah portion, we are told the following: *26:17 'You have today declared the Lord to be your God, and that you would walk in His ways and keep His statutes, His commandments and His ordinances, and listen to His voice. 26:18 'The Lord has today declared you to be His people, a treasured possession, as He promised you, and that you should keep all His commandments; (NASB)* Notice how listening to the Lord God our Father in heaven is paralleled to keeping His statutes, commands, and ordinances. We are told, by declaring the Lord to be our God, we are called to walk in the way He has

chosen for us as His people. As a result of doing so, The Lord has called us *“le’Am Segolah”* (לְעַם סְגֻלָּה), a treasured people, and it is repeated that being a treasured people, we are to keep His commands. These truths are apparent according to the Apostles delineation of the moral imperatives found in the Apostolic Writings and as enumerated in the *“aseret ha’dvarim”* (עֲשֵׂרֵת הַדְּבָרִים), the Ten Commandments.

The opening verses to Parashat Ki Tavo provides context for the verses that call us a treasured people, we are told 26:13 *‘You shall say before the Lord your God, ‘I have removed the sacred portion from my house, and also have given it to the Levite and the alien, the orphan and the widow, according to all Your commandments which You have commanded me; I have not transgressed or forgotten any of Your commandments. (NASB)* What is this *“removing the sacred portion”* (בְּעֵרַתִּי הַקֹּדֶשׁ) described as something that is given to the Levite, the alien, the orphan, and the widow? Regarding the sacred portion, was it not supposed to only go to the Levite? What is Moshe trying to say here? The sacred portion according to the Torah is holy (הַקֹּדֶשׁ) and not to be eaten when one is in mourning, or unclean, and neither is a portion of it to be offered to the dead. What was going on in the land of Canaan that caused the people to offer food to the dead? According to Canaanite beliefs, when the physical body dies, the nephesh (*“soul”*) departs from the body to the land of Mot (*the land of the dead*). As a result, the bodies were buried with grave goods, and offerings of food and drink to sustain them for their journey and to ensure the dead would not bother the living. In addition, dead relatives were venerated and sometimes asked for help. (*Alan Segal, Life After Death: A History of the Afterlife in Western Religion, Doubleday Religion; 1st Ed, 2004, 880*) Here we are given the Torah command that as a holy people, as a treasured people before God, we are not to do such things.

In this week’s portion we are reminded that God delivered Israel with a mighty hand and an out stretched arm. We are also given instructions for living as a holy people before the God of all creation. This is a very significant thing to consider, as *Sforno on Devarim / Deuteronomy 26:18*, points out in his commentary saying, *‘וה’ האמירך היום, by entering into the covenant with you, a distinction He has not accorded to any other nation.* *וה’ האמירך היום במה שהוא נכנס בברית עמך נתן לך מעלה בזה:* The covenant that we have with the Lord is a special, unique, distinct, and is a signifi-

cant calling upon our lives. Do you agree?

**ספר דברים פרק כו Devarim / Deuteronomy 26:13-19**

יג ואמרתי לפני יהוה אלהיך  
בערתי הקדש מן-הבית וגם נ-  
תתיו ללוי ולגר ליתום ולאלמנה  
ככל-מצותך אשר צויתני לא-  
עברתי ממצותיך ולא שכחתי:  
יד לא-אכלתי באני ממנו ולא-  
בערתי ממנו בטמא ולא-נתתי  
ממנו למת שמעתי בקול יהוה  
אלהי עשיתי ככל אשר צויתני:  
טו השקיפה ממעון קדשך  
מן-השמים וברך את-עמך את-  
ישראל ואת האדמה אשר נתתה  
לנו כאשר נשבעת לאבותינו ארץ  
זבת חלב ודבש: ס [שלישי]  
טז היום הנה יהוה אלהיך מצוה  
לעשות את-החקים האלה ואת-  
המשפטים ושמרת ועשית אותם  
בכל-לבבך ובכל-נפשך: זז את-  
יהוה האמרת היום להיות לך  
לאלהים וללכת בדרךיו ולשמר  
חקיו ומצותיו ומשפטיהם ולש-  
מע בקלו: יח ויהוה האמירך  
היום להיות לו לעם סגלה כאשר  
דבר-לך ולשמר כל-מצותיו: יט  
ולתתה עליון על כל-הגוים אשר  
עשה לתהלה ולשם ולתפארת  
ולתהלה עם-קדש ליהוה אלהיך  
כאשר דבר:

26:13 'You shall say before the Lord your God, 'I have removed the sacred portion from my house, and also have given it to the Levite and the alien, the orphan and the widow, according to all Your commandments which You have commanded me; I have not transgressed or forgotten any of Your commandments. 26:14 'I have not eaten of it while mourning, nor have I removed any of it while I was unclean, nor offered any of it to the dead. I have listened to the voice of the Lord my God; I have done according to all that You have commanded me. 26:15 'Look down from Your holy habitation, from heaven, and bless Your people Israel, and the ground which You have given us, a land flowing with milk and honey, as You swore to our fathers.' 26:16 'This day the Lord your God commands you to do these statutes and ordinances. You shall therefore be careful to do them with all your heart and with all your soul. 26:17 'You have today declared the Lord to be your God, and that you would walk in His ways and keep His statutes, His commandments and His ordinances, and listen to His voice. 26:18 'The Lord has today declared you to be His people, a treasured possession, as He promised you, and that you should keep all His commandments; 26:19 and that He will set you high above all nations which He has made, for praise, fame, and honor; and that you shall be a consecrated people to the Lord your God, as He has spoken.' (NASB)

In Parashat Ki Tavo, from *Devarim / Deuteronomy 26:13*, we are told *26:13 'You shall say before the Lord your God, 'I have removed the sacred portion from my house, and also have given it to the Levite and the alien, the orphan and the widow, according to all Your commandments which You have commanded me; I have not transgressed or forgotten any of Your commandments. (NASB)* What is this “*removing the sacred portion*” (בְּעֵרְתִּי הַקֹּדֶשׁ) described as something that is given to the Levite, the alien, the orphan, and the widow? The *Talmud Bavli Berakhot 35b* provides some insights into the meaning of this text.

While studying the rabbis, according to the Talmud, the Mishnah, and the Midrashim, the most important point to think about is how to understand what the rabbis are trying to say. The first thing one needs to do is to begin with a list of questions (such as the following list) which should function as a starting place, not as an end, but as the beginning to our journey in understanding the Talmud, Hebrew Scriptures, and the Jewish mind-set. Studying Talmud requires a lot of thought and insight into the Scriptures beyond what most of us are used too, and especially how the rabbis process and think about the Scriptures. I believe it is only after years of studying the rabbinic literature that we are able to begin to grasp how the rabbis are thinking and this occurs by our own minds beginning to take on similar thought patterns, as compared to the rabbis. The more we study the rabbinic literature, looking back at the Apostolic Writings (NT), we can see how apparent the New Testament Scriptures are written with a rabbinic flavor, especially the writings of the Apostle Paul. When studying the rabbinic literature, the important point is to ask questions for the purpose of fully understanding the rabbinic discussion. The following list of question is titled the “*Talmudic Hypothetico-deductive Method.*”

### **Talmudic Hypothetico-deductive Method**

- What is the broad topic of the discussion?
- What does the author intend to say?
- Is the statement obvious?
- Is it plain
- Is it a statement of fact or a concrete instance?
  - o What underlying principle does it involve?
  - o Is it a broad generalization?

- o What exactly does it include?
- o Is it a general exclusion?
- o What exactly does it exclude?
- Under what circumstances is the statement true?
- Under what qualifications is it permissible / forbidden?
- Is there a subsequent statement that modifies or invalidates the statement under consideration?

The harmonization of apparent contradictions and interlinking of apparent irrelevancies are two characteristic features of the Talmudic method of text study.

- Why does the Author use one word rather than another?
- What need was there for the mentioning of a specific instance as an illustration?
- How does the contrast between the illustrations influence the interpretation and application of the Scripture?
- Do certain Authorities differ? If they do, why do they differ?

According to Parashat Ki Tavo (*Devarim / Deuteronomy 26:1-29:8*), specifically, *Devarim / Deuteronomy 26:13* the *Talmud Bavli Berakhot 35b* has some interesting insights concerning the sacred or holy thing.

### ***Talmud Bavli Berakhot 35b***

*Rabbah b. Bar Hannah also stated that R. Johanan said in the name of R. Judah b. R. El'ai : Come and see that the later generations are not like the former generations. The former generations used to bring their fruits home by way of the kitchen-garden[4] in order to make them liable to the tithe ; whereas the later generations bring their fruits home by way of the roof, or courts, or enclosures in order to exempt them from the tithe. For R. Jannai has said : Produce is not subject to the tithe until it sees the face of the house ; as it is said, "I have put away the hallowed things out of my house" (Deut. xxvi. 13). R. Johanan said : Even [if it see] a fixed court [it is subject to the tithe] ;*

as it is said, “That they may eat within thy gates and be satisfied” (ibid. v. 12). Except over wine, etc. Why is wine different ? Should one say because it is changed [from the grape] into something higher [in value], therefore there is a change in the benediction, but lo, oil which is changed [from the olive] into something higher [in value] has no alteration in the benediction ; for Rab Judah said in the name of Samuel, and similarly said R. Isaac in the name of R. Johanan : Over olive-oil we pronounce the benediction “...Who createst the fruit of the tree” ! The answer is: In this case [of oil, the benediction is unaltered] because none other is possible. What other benediction could he say? Should he use the formula “...Who createst the fruit of the olive,” the olive itself is called “fruit[1]”! Then let him say “...Who createst the fruit of the olive-tree[2].” But said Mar Zotra : Wine nourishes, oil does not. Oil does not nourish ? Lo, there is a Mishnaic teaching : He who vows [to abstain] from food may partake of water and salt ! And we argue that water and salt are not called “food,” but everything else is so called ; and we further say that this is a refutation of Rab and Samuel who maintain that we pronounce the benediction “...Who createst various kinds of food” only over the five species[3]. Moreover Rab Huna said : [The quoted Mishnah means,] Whoever declares “Everything that nourishes [I forbid] myself” — hence conclude that oil does nourish[4] ! But wine satisfies and oil does not. Does wine satisfy? Lo, Raba used to drink wine the whole of the day preceding Passover to whet his appetite in order to eat the unleavened bread with greater zest ! A large quantity whets the appetite, but a little satisfies [hunger]. But does it satisfy at all? For lo, it is written, “And wine that maketh glad the heart of man, making the face brighter than oil, and bread that stayeth man’s heart” (Ps. civ. 15) — it is bread, not wine, that is a stay! Nay, wine does both, it satisfies and makes glad, whereas bread is only a stay, but does not cheer. If so, let him utter three benedictions[5] ! But men do not fix their meals for its

sake[6]. Rab Nahman b. Isaac[7] asked Raba : How is it if a man did fix his meal on its account[8]? He replied: When Elijah[9] comes, let him say whether such can be fixed for a meal ; at present, at least, such a thought does not exist amongst men[10]. It was stated above : “Rab Judah said in the name of Samuel, and similarly said R. Isaac in the name of R. Johanan : Over olive-oil we pronounce the benediction ‘...Who createst the fruit of the tree’.” How is this meant[1]? Should I say that he drinks it as a beverage, it does him harm[2]; for there is a teaching : He who drinks the oil of an offering repays its value but not a fifth in addition ; but he who anoints himself with the oil of an offering repays its value plus a fifth[3]! But [perhaps it is here meant that] he eats it together with bread. If so, the bread is the principal food and the oil is only accessory; and we have the Mishnaic teaching: This is the general rule : In the case of a food which is the principal thing and together with it something accessory, the benediction is to be uttered over the former, and there is no necessity for a benediction over the latter ! But [perhaps what is meant is] he drinks it with elaiogaron[4]. (Rabbah b, Samuel said[5] : Elaiogaron is the juice of beets ; oxygaron is the juice

Asking these questions, such as in the case of the “*Talmudic Hypothetico-deductive Method*,” we have the following questions, (i) *What is the broad topic of the discussion?* (ii) *What is the underlying principle?* And (iii) *What are the rabbis intending on conveying by the discussion?*

A short summary of the Talmudic discussion. The rabbinic discussion opens with a discussion on the verse in question (*Devarim / Deuteronomy 26:13* “... *I have removed the sacred portion from my house...*”) The rabbis speak of the former generations as opposed to the later generations with regard to the tithe. The former generation brought their fruits into their home by way of the kitchen, making them liable to the command whereas the later generation brought it by way of the roof and the courts to exempt themselves from the tithe. The discussion changed to that of wine, whether one should say the benediction over the wine, and why

there is a change in the benediction over wine as opposed to oil as detailed in the Sidur (the rabbinic prayer book)? One says a blessing over the wine and not the oil because one nourishes while the other does not. One does say a blessing over the oil when one eats bread with the oil upon it. The idea is that the benediction is uttered over the former, and there is no necessity for a benediction over the later.

Is this a discussion about the benediction before and/or after eating, or about the tithe? The rabbis speak of the importance of the benediction over what we eat, why? They also discuss when is the benediction not necessary as opposed to when the benediction is always necessary? This is related to our Scriptural context which states, *Devarim / Deuteronomy 26:18 'The Lord has today declared you to be His people, a treasured possession, as He promised you, and that you should keep all His commandments; (NASB)* In the Talmud, the rabbis open with the former generation, who appears to be obedient to the command in the sense that they make themselves obligated (liable) to the tithe, as opposed to the later generation which attempted to find exception by bringing in the fruit (tithe) through another entrance to their home. The idea is that as a treasured people of God, we should always be doing what is good and right in the sight of the Lord God in heaven. The discussion follows in the Talmud how one has reasoned within himself over whether he is obligated to the tithe the fruits of his labor. It appears that the righteous generation did what was right and obeyed the command, as opposed to the wicked generation that took it upon themselves, going great lengths to exempt themselves from the tithe, even climbing upon the roof in an attempt to state they are exempt and may eat their fruit and not have to give any to the priest, the widow, the poor, or the stranger. It is interesting how the discussion proceeds to blessing over the wine, oil, and bread. Do you think, in the Messiah Yeshua, that we are obligated to be thankful for what God has given us?

In *Midrash Tehillim 75, Part 6*, the rabbis say that through sin, Israel had their lifted up horns removed which were then given to the nations to make war, to destroy, to burn, and to kill. Notice how in the hands of Israel, when the Lord lifts up the horn of Israel ("*horn*" referring to God honoring and blessing a person), we find the lifting of the covenant of God, of peace, mercy, justice, and truth. On the other hand, when the lifted up horn is given to the nations, there is nothing but destruction, wick-



edness, pride, unrighteousness, and lies, which is paralleled to the fourth beast in the book of Daniel, dreadful and terrible. The heathen nations are those who reject God's Torah, they are not a treasured people, and are symbolized by the beasts of destruction in the book of Daniel. As long as the horn of the wicked endures, the horn of Israel will remain cut off. On the other hand, the midrash states, *"but the verse further proves that when God lifts up the horns of the righteous, He will also cut off the horns of the wicked, as is said, All the horns of the wicked will I cut off (Tehillim / Psalms 75:11). Then The horns of the Righteous One will be lifted up, that is, the horns of Israel which the Righteous One of the universe had cut off."* When the Lord lifts up our horn, when He honors us, brings prosperity and life; when the Lord does these things, do we show forth the mercy, forgiveness, love, justice, and truth that we are supposed to? When the Lord honors man, as it is described in the Torah portion on being a treasured people, his response should be to bring glory to the Name of the Lord. In the Talmudic discussion on the former and the later generations, we seem to be given a subtle message of how we are to act and respond based upon being a treasured people, obedient to God's Word. Take for example, in *Midrash Tehillim 75, Part 4*, the rabbis describe the purpose of the golden calf. They say that the golden calf was constructed (*"used or made,"* וַעֲשׂוּ אוֹתוֹ מֵעֵשֶׂה) in contempt to Moshe כִּי זֶה מֹשֶׁה וַאֲמָרוּ *"saying, as for this man Moshe... etc."* The people were in the process of finding their own way, by the work of their own hand, which is illustrated in the *"half shekel"* example of the rabbis saying they raised themselves (*raising their horns, they honored themselves*) by heeding the *"this"* of the command, meaning that they took hold of the command with the motivation that they could save themselves by performing the command of the half shekel. The Scripture clearly tells us that we are not able to save ourselves and the command is not meant for self justification. The Scriptures says, *'The Lord has today declared you to be His people, a treasured possession, as He promised you...'* Notice how the promise and the declaration comes first. We are then told, *"... and that you should keep all His commandments"* (NASB) which follows second.

Because we are living in this present evil age, as the children of God, the Lord is showing us His great love for us by placing restrictions upon our lives, just as a loving father would do to his son. This is why we need to cling to righteousness as if our lives depended upon it. Many struggle

in their walk due to not recognizing the importance of walking in righteousness. This is why many are not satisfied, and even missing out on the blessings God has for them. When we don't strive to walk in righteousness, we are stopping the Lord God from moving the mountains that are in our lives. As a treasured people, we should not be looking for ways to get around the command. If you balk at the idea of obeying the command, there may be a greater issue at hand with regard to your relationship with the Father in heaven and Yeshua the Messiah. Where is your service to God and do you have the correct motivation? Yeshua said and expected his followers to live righteous lives as he stated, that we will be persecuted for righteousness sake (*Matthew 5:10*). The righteousness of God is not an invisible thing, it is something that flows out from us by the way in which the Lord God in heaven has worked in our lives, to transform us, make us new, and to write His Torah upon our hearts. Based upon this week's Torah portion, Parashat Ki Tavo, the question is to ask yourself when you start each new day, *"Who is going to take reign in my body today, will it be righteousness, or unrighteousness? Will it be our Lord, Yeshua the Messiah, or the self and the evil inclination?"* Remember, righteousness is a fruit that is given to us through the Holy Spirit of God, therefore, the good fruit of righteousness must also be a part of our lives because we are an Am Segolah, A Treasured People!

