

Parashat Ki Tavo / פרשת כי-תבוא

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Can you sin in your thought life?

This Weeks Reading List:

Torah: Deuteronomy 26:1-29:8

Haftarah: Isaiah 60:1-60:22

B'rit HaChadashah: Ephesians 1:3-6 Revelation 21:10-27

Not only do we thank God for fulfilling his promise to our forefathers (Avot) we are reminded of the reason why God gave Yisrael the land, for the reason of becoming a nation which will represent him. However, are our outward actions the only important aspect of our becoming an Am Kedosh (holy nation)? The declarations found in Parashat Ki Tavo are so significant, for they emphasize the reason for our being an Am kadosh (Holy Nation) by keeping the mitzvot (commands) we can be a model for all the nations to follow. However, can we keep these mitzvot if our thought life is less than perfect? Let's discuss this further by reading the following verses.

Deuteronomy 27:14-28:1

27:14 The L'vi'im, speaking loudly, will proclaim to every man of Isra'el: 27:15 "A curse on anyone who makes a carved or metal image, something ADONAI detests, the handiwork of a craftsman, and sets it up in secret! All the people are to respond by saying, 'Amen!' 27:16 "A curse on anyone who dishonors his father or mother.' All the people are to say, 'Amen!' 27:17 "A curse on anyone who moves his neighbor's boundary marker.' All the people are to say, 'Amen!' 27:18 "A curse on anyone who causes a blind person to lose his way on the road.' All the people are to say, 'Amen!' 27:19 "A curse on anyone who interferes with justice for the foreigner, orphan or widow.' All the people are to say, 'Amen!' 27:20 "A curse on anyone who has sexual relations with his father's wife, because he has violated his father's rights.' All the people are to say, 'Amen!' 27:21 "A curse on anyone who has sexual relations with any kind of animal.' All the people are to say, 'Amen!' 27:22 "A curse on anyone who has sexual relations with his sister, no matter whether she is the daughter of his father or of his mother.' All the people are to say, 'Amen!' 27:23 "A curse on anyone who has sexual relations with his mother-in-law.' All the people are to say, 'Amen!' 27:24 "A curse on anyone who secretly attacks a fellow member of the community.' All the people are to say, 'Amen!' 27:25 "A curse on anyone who accepts a bribe to kill an innocent person.' All the people are to say, 'Amen!' 27:26 "A curse on anyone who does not confirm the words of this Torah by putting them into practice.' All the people are to say, 'Amen!' 28:1 "If you listen closely to what ADONAI your God says, observing and obeying all his mitzvot which I am giving you today, ADONAI your God will raise you high above all the nations on earth; (CJB)

These verses describe acts of wickedness and immorality. I chose to list these verses starting with verse fourteen describing a person who sets up a graven image in secret because I believe we can derive a midrash on the secret place. To examine this I ask the question “Where does sin begin?” Does sin begin when we take actions physically or does sin begin in our heart/mind?

Where does sin begin?

Heart/Mind ⇒ Desires ⇒ Actions ⇒ Sin?

There is a place that each of us has, whether we want to admit it or not, which we have setup that nobody sees except God. That place is the secret place of our heart. I want to discuss about the difference between our imagination and our actions; if sin is conceived in the heart, then our thoughts are a source of sinful actions in our lives. The question becomes whether we are permitted to think sinfully as long as we do not act upon our desires or not. Examples of our thought life would be (i) thinking “I wish someone were dead,” (ii) driving down the road, someone cuts you off and you start swearing at them, in your thoughts or verbally and physically making signs of your anger, (iii) walking in the mall or into a store, movie theater, or seeing on television a good looking woman or man and had some less than moral thoughts about them? Have you thought that it was ok as long as you didn’t act upon them you are not an immoral person? Let us look first at what Judaism has to say on this topic.

One of the great rabbinic sages discusses the topic of our desires and our actions. For example, is there a distinction that can be made between our imagination and our actions. In Rambam’s discussion on the holy ones he makes a distinction between our imagination and desires and our actions.

וקדושים – And Holy Ones. The term may refer to the angels (lyun Tefillah) or, as most Jewish commentators agree, to Israel (Abudraham). As Rambam defines it (referring to Leviticus 18:1-3), human holiness is measured by how well a person controls his permissible desires. Someone who seeks ways to indulge his lusts and passions without directly violating the law is described as a התורה ברשות נבל (degenerate with the Torah’s permission).

According to Rabbi Moshe Ben Maimon, a person has the ability to think lustful thoughts, as long as he or she does not act upon them, it is ok. I believe this presents a problem, because by examining the Torah we see God is not only concerned with our actions, but also our thought life. Everyone who is spiritually in tune with the Lord struggles with this problem of their thought life. Struggling with our thought life is something that is common to man and so it is not surprising that Yeshua taught on the topic of our thoughts in the book of Matthew.

Matthew 5:28

5:28 But I tell you that a man who even looks at a woman with the purpose of lusting after her has already committed adultery with her in his heart. (CJB)

In this one verse Yeshua is demonstrating the reality of sin that not only is sin conceived in our hearts and imagination, but that one does not have to act upon ones desires in order to have committed a sin before God. The example Yeshua gave was that of lusting for someone sexually. I believe this follows along what is taught in the Torah because God is very concerned with our thought life. The following are a few examples that I hope demonstrate God's concern with our heart:

Genesis 6:5

6:5 ADONAI saw that the people on earth were very wicked, that all the imaginings of their hearts were always of evil only. (CJB)

Exodus 25:2

25:2 "Tell the people of Isra'el to take up a collection for me -accept a contribution from anyone who wholeheartedly wants to give. (CJB)

Deuteronomy 5:29

5:29 Oh, how I wish their hearts would stay like this always, that they would fear me and obey all my mitzvot; so that it would go well with them and their children forever. (CJB)

6:6 These words, which I am ordering you today, are to be on your heart; (CJB)

8:2 You are to remember everything of the way in which ADONAI led you these forty years in the desert, humbling and testing you in order to know what was in your heart - whether you would obey his mitzvot or not. (CJB)

These select verses from the Torah describe the concern God has for our hearts. Not only does deception enter through and into our hearts to change and alter our perceptions of spiritual truth, but the heart is the meeting place for the conception and birth of sin in our lives. It is very important for us to put God's word into and upon our hearts so we can become the Am Kedosh God wants us to become. With a biblical worldview we can become what God wants us to become and influence those who me wants us to influence.

To reiterate the primary purpose for keeping the mitzvot God had originally told Bnei Yisrael (children of Israel) at Har Sinai (mountain of Sinai) that he was going to make a special covenant with them. *Exodus 19:5 Now if you will pay careful attention to what I say and keep my covenant, then you will be my own treasure from among all the peoples, for all the earth is mine; 19:6 and you will be a kingdom of cohanim for me, a nation set apart. These are the words you are to speak to the people of Isra'el." (CJB)*

Shmot 19:5-6

19:5 veata im-shamoa tishmeu bekoli ushemartem et-beriti vihyitem li segula mikol-haamim ki-li kol-haarets: 19:6 veatem tihyu-li mamleket kohanim vegoi kadosh ele hadevarim asher tedaber el-benei yisrael:

שמות 19:5-6

5 אֶתְכֶם עַל־כַּנְפֵי נְשָׂרִים וְאָבָא אֶתְכֶם אֵלָי׃ וְעַתָּה אִם־שָׁמַעַ
 תִּשְׁמְעוּ בְּקוֹלִי וּשְׁמַרְתֶּם אֶת־בְּרִיתִי וְהָיִיתֶם לִי סִגְלָה מִכָּל־
 6 הָעַמִּים כִּי־לִי כָּל־הָאָרֶץ׃ וְאַתֶּם תִּהְיוּ־לִי מִמְּלַכֹּת כְּהַנִּים וְגוֹי
 7 קָדוֹשׁ אֱלֹהֵי הַדְּבָרִים אֲשֶׁר תִּדְבַּר אֶל־בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל׃ וַיָּבֹא מֹשֶׁה

In Parashat Ki Tavo God is reaffirming his covenant promise to Yisrael which was originally given at Har Sinai before they enter into the Promised land.. *Deuteronomy 26:18 In turn ADONAI is agreeing today that you are his own unique treasure, as he promised you; that you are to observe all his mitzvot; 26:19 and that he will raise you high above all the nations he has made, in praise, reputation and glory; and that, as he said, you will be a holy people for ADONAI your God." (CJB)*

Devarim 26:18-19

26:18 vaadonai heemirkha hayom lihyot lo leam segula kaasher diber-lakh velishmor kol-mitsvotav: 26:19 uletitkha elyon al kol-hagoyim asher asa lithila uleshem uletifaret velihyotkha am-kadsh laadonai eloheikha kaasher diber:

דברים 26:18-19

18 וְלִשְׁמַע בְּקוֹלִי׃ וַיְהִי־הָ הַיּוֹם הַאֲמִירָתְךָ הַיּוֹם לַחַיִּים לְזֵכֶר לְעַם סִגְלָה
 19 כַּאֲשֶׁר דִּבַּרְתָּ וְלִשְׁמֹר כָּל־מִצְוֹתָיו׃ וְלִתְתֶנָּה עֲלִיזָה עַל כָּל־
 הַגּוֹיִם אֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה לְתַהַלְלָהּ וְלִשְׁמֹר וּלְתַפְאֶרֶת וְלִהְיוֹתְךָ עִם־קָדוֹשׁ
 לַיהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ כַּאֲשֶׁר דִּבַּר׃

In conclusion, part of our being God's representatives here on earth we have to consider our thoughts because our thought life can take us to places we should not be going as believers. Deception is at its greatest peak but not only is deception at its peak; it is increasing in cleverness and craftiness. HaSatan is trying to destroy the family and separate relationships for the purpose of (1) destroying what God has created and (2) minimizing each believers effectiveness in their testimony for Yeshua.

Something that is central to a truly biblical worldview is having an understanding of the major events of the past and the future which is found in the history of the Bible. Then, from understanding the implications of these biblical events we can learn how to view the world from God's perspective which helps to fight off the various deceptions that are so rampant in this world today. The real battleground is in the heart and in our imagination; this is why God told us to write his words upon our hearts. We need to feed the spirit with God's Holy Word. Identifying practices which lead to sin calls for personal reflection upon our relationships with others, with God, and our spiritual state and this is perfect for this time during the month of Elul. So, the things we can take away from this study in Parashat Ki Tavo are.

1. Sin is conceived in the heart; then, sin is given birth in our actions.
2. God considers our “thought life” to be no different than our outward actions according to Yeshua’s explanation in Matthew 5:28. This is why God is concerned with the heart of man.
3. Many instances in the Torah demonstrate God’s concern with our heart which reinforces the idea that even though we may be hiding our sinful thoughts and desires in our heart, we are still guilty whether we take action upon our desires or not.
4. During this time of repentance and personal reflection, try to look a little closer at your thought life.
5. The best way to modify our thought life is by replacing the ungodly thoughts with God’s Holy Word. By doing so we can become what God wants us to be, a light unto the world.

Prayer

Heavenly Father,

Please forgive me for my thoughts, I have violated your mitzvot in my heart and I am guilty even though I have not acted upon my sinful desires. Lord please create within me a new heart, restore to me the joy of your salvation, and make in me a new found desire to serve you with all my heart, all my mind, all my soul and all my strength. Thank you for your everlasting mercy and grace.

In Yeshua’s Name I pray. Amen.

Questions To Reflect Upon

- *In my spiritual walk with God, how can I reconnect the Bible to the world God created in such a way that his word becomes real to me?*
- *Has the Bible lost its influence on me in my life and relationship with God and have I fully embraced Yeshua in faith unto eternal life*

Be blessed in Yeshua the Messiah!

הללויה לאדוננו מורנו ורבינו ישוע מלך המשיח לעולם ועד:

Hallelujah for our Lord, our Teacher, our Rabbi,
“Yeshua” King Messiah for ever and ever