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September 21, 2019
21 Ellul, 5779

Shabbat Shalom Newsletter

Shabbat Ki-Tavo

כִּי-תָבוֹא

Deuteronomy 26:1 - 29:8

NEWS

SHANAH TOVAH HAPPY NEW YEAR

5780

LET'S PRAY TOGETHER

We pray every week for the Jewish Friendship Ministry. I suggest our partners pray from September 22 through 28 for The Jewish people of Mexico and Panama were we have a Jewish Adventist ministry. Our friends in Mexico city have started a work in the Jewish neighborhood of Mexico, but they need our prayers to continue this ministry.

ROSH HASHANA

Rosh Hashana is next week – have you prepared something in your congregation? Let us know, and we will be happy to advertise your celebrations and events.

SHANAH TOVAH

Rosh Hashana is the time to say to your Jewish friends, *Shanah Tovah*, which means Happy New Year!

ROSH HASHANA IN UKRAINE

In many of our Jewish Adventist congregations, we reach out to our Jewish friends in coordination with the Feast calendar.

Here is the advertisement we received from Alexandra and Vitaly Obrevko who are organizing their celebration of Roah Hashana on the 29th of September at 3:00 pm in Kiev.



MISSION CONFERENCE AT ANDREWS UNIVERSITY

The mission conference September 12-14 at Andrews University was excellent, with many papers presented on "Death and Ancestors in the Global Missiological Perspective."

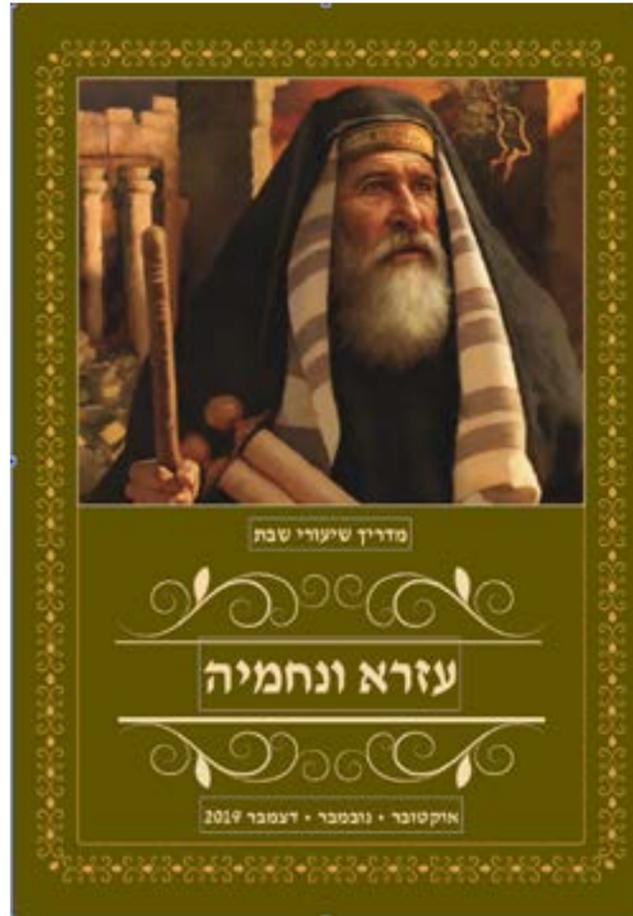
In this context, Reinaldo Siqueira prepared a paper, "Death and Ancestors in Judaism." However, since he could not be present, he

asked Richard Elofer to present a PowerPoint slide show that he prepared.

Dr. Siquiera's paper can be downloaded from tiny.cc/mission

HEBREW SABBATH SCHOOL

Israel Field Publishing Director, Shalom David, has published a new Hebrew Bible Study Guide for this next quarter (October to December 2019). These lessons are on the books of Ezra and Nehemiah. The Hebrew Sabbath School study guide can be downloaded from our website: <https://wjafc.globalmissioncenters.org/> If you are not yet a member of our website, we invite you to apply.



- Dutch Edition:** Hubert Paulleta
- English Edition:** Richard-Amram Elofer
- French Edition:** Sabine Baris
- German Edition:** Yaw Heiser
- Portuguese Edition:** Carlos Muniz
- Russian Edition:** Alexandra Obrevko
- Spanish Edition:** Claudia Masiero

SHABBAT SHALOM

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PARASHA FOR THIS WEEK

KI-TAVO

כִּי-תָבוֹא

PARASHA OVERVIEW: DEUTERONOMY 26:1 - 29:8

When the children of Israel will dwell in the Land of Israel, their first fruits are to be taken to the Sanctuary/Beth Hamikdash (Temple) and given to the Cohanim in a ceremony expressing recognition that it is G-d who guides the history of the People of Israel throughout all ages.

This text forms one of the central parts of the *Haggadah* that we read at the Passover *Seder*. On the last day of *Pesach* of the fourth and seventh years of the seven-year *shemitta* (jubilee) cycle.

A person must recite a disclosure stating that he has indeed distributed the *ma'aser* (tithes) to the appropriate people in the prescribed manner.

With this *mitzvah* Moshe concludes the commandments that G-d has told him to give to the Israel.

Moshe exhorts them to walk in G-d's ways, because they are set aside as a treasured people to G-d.

When Israel cross the Jordan

River they are to make a new commitment to G-d and the Torah.

Huge stones are to be erected and the Torah is to be written on them (according to the Jewish tradition in the world's seventy primary languages, in order to specify that these laws are for everybody, not only Israel). After which they are to be covered over with a thin layer of plaster.

Half the tribes will stand on Mount Gerizim, and half on Mount Eval, and the *levi'im* (levites) will stand in a valley between the two mountains. There the *levi'im* will recite 12 *mitsvot* and all the people will answer "amen" to the blessings and the curses.

Moshe then details the blessings that will be bestowed upon *Bnei Yisrael* (children of Israel). These blessings are both physical and spiritual. However if the people of Israel do not keep the Torah, Moshe details a chilling picture of destruction, resulting in exile and wandering among the nations.

KI-TAVO, PARASHA'S TITLE

This *parasha* begins with, "Vehaya *Ki Tavo*." The word *Vehaya* is the verb "to be," and *Ki-Tavo* means "when you come." As it seems that the word *Vehaya* is not necessary in the text, most translators do not translate this word and begin the verse with, "When you come," which is the direct translation of *Ki-Tavo*. Thus this verse is translated: "When you will enter the land that *Hashem* your G-d is giving you as an inheritance, and you possess it and dwell in it . . ." (Deuteronomy 26:1). However, Jewish tradition has always seen in the word *Vehaya* a connotation of happiness. Let's remember that the Promised Land also symbolically represents the heavenly Promised Land the Messiah will introduce us to after his coming. Entering the Land of the L-rd will always produce happiness in our heart.

TO REJOICE IN THE L-RD

This week's *parasha*, *Ki Tavo*, begins with the *mitzvah* of "*Bikurim*": bringing the first fruits to the *Cohen* (priest) in the Holy Temple. *Bikurim* is an expression of appreciation by the owner of the land for the blessings of a good harvest that G-d gave him. The Torah says, "And you shall rejoice in all the good that the L-RD your G-d has given to you and to your house" (Deuteronomy 26:11). Why do we need a directive to rejoice when we should automatically be happy when we have good things?

Rabbi Mordechai Gifter, former *Rosh HaYeshiva* of *Telse Yeshiva* in Cleveland, Ohio says: "Man's nature is to constantly want more than he presently has. 'He who has one hundred wants two hundred.' Our moments of joy are mixed with sadness over what we lack, and this is destructive both physically and spiritually. Therefore, the Torah commands us to focus on and rejoice with what we have in order to feel a complete joy."

The *mitzvah* of *Bikurim* also teaches us to be happy and rejoice with whatever blessings G-d has given us. A person who believes that whatever he or she has is a gift from G-d will not be jealous of others, but will truly rejoice and be happy and satisfied in life.

If you think that you will be happy only when you have more, then you will never be happy. When you finally get what you were hoping for, you will then focus on getting more and will again feel unhappy. Happiness is dependent upon your state of mind. You can only be happy if you appreciate what you have and what you are presently doing.

Adding to Rabbi Pliskin's message, *Pirkei Avot* (the first *mishna* or "teachings of the fathers"), chapter four states, "Who is the rich person? He who is happy with his portion." "Regardless of what you have, you are only wealthy if you have mastered the ability to



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appreciate what you have. According to Torah, true wealth is measured in terms of happiness!"

The *mitzvah* of *Bikurim* teaches us that before we enjoy the bounty and blessings which G-d gives us, we must give some back. There are many believers who are like multi-millionaires with regards to their faith, who don't know that they are rich because all of their "money" is sewn into the mattress and they don't know that it is there. Instead, they complain about sleeping on a lumpy mattress!

Unless one is thankful for his blessings, he can have eyes, hands, feet, a mind to think with – and still be depressed. Imagine if you were blind and suddenly were given the gift of sight. Wouldn't you be "flying high"? You would be beside yourself with happiness! Why wait to appreciate what you have? Make a list of your gifts and what you are grateful for – it is good preparation for *Rosh Hashana*!

THE CURSE OF NOT REJOICING

We can be cursed if we don't serve the L-rd with joy. "[These curses] shall be a sign and for a proof to you and your descendants forever; because you did not serve the Almighty your G-d with joy and gladness of heart when you enjoyed an abundance of all things." (Deut. 28:45-48). This emotional commandment appears three times in this *parasha*, and indicates the commandments are geared toward creating joy; when the commandment to rejoice is ignored, bad things happen. Most of the time, we don't rejoice in performing the *mitsvot* because we don't understand the nature of G-d's commandments. G-d gave His commandments to a people of slaves who had just been liberated from slavery and needed to learn to live free from any master. When they received commands from their Egyptian masters, they were not happy – they wanted to rebel against them. Now they have a new Master – this Master is the Creator, the Almighty. How should they react toward this new Master? Not as in Egypt towards an Egyptian master! When G-d gives His commandments, it is for the wellbeing of His people. Since G-d is the Creator, He knows everything about us and knows what is good for us and what is not good. That's why when we perform

"On the stones, you shall write all the words of this Torah in a clear script."

(Deuteronomy 27:8)

the *mitsvot* we are to perform them with *kavanah* (intention or purpose) and with joy, because it is the L-rd, the Creator, who gave them for the happiness of His people.

WRITE IT ON STONES

The Torah states: "And you shall write on the stones all the words of this Torah very clearly..." (Deut. 27:8). According to Jewish tradition everyone should write a *Sepher Torah* (Torah scroll) during his lifetime. Some people who have the capacity to do it, do it themselves, others pay a scribe to do it for them. The purpose of this *mitsvah* or advice is to impress our heart to remember what is written in the Bible.

In the book of Proverbs it is written, "write them upon the tablet of thine heart" (Proverbs 3:3), and in the book of Jeremiah it is spoken about the new covenant, and one of the results of the new covenant is that G-d writes His law on our hearts: "Behold, the days come, saith the L-RD, that I will make a new covenant with the house of Yisrael, and with the house of Judah: . . . But this shall be the covenant that I will make with the house of Yisrael; After those days, saith the L-RD, I will put My law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their G-d, and they shall be My people." (Jer. 31:31, 33).

Maybe we should follow this advice and write for ourselves one copy of the Bible in our lifetime. This would be one of the best ways for G-d to write it in our heart.

BLESSINGS AND CURSES

Our *parasha* begins with the commandment of *Bikurim* and ends with the recitation of the curses, bringing the total number of curses in the Torah to 98. What connection can we see between the beginning and the end?

The commandment of *Bikurim* applies to even the smallest landholder with an olive tree growing in his

"G-d will open His good treasury in heaven to give your land rain at precisely the right time, and to bless everything you do. You will lend many nations, but you will not have to borrow." (Deuteronomy 28:12)

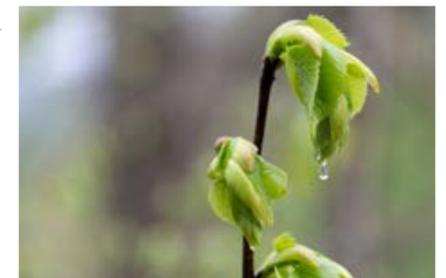
backyard, tying a band around the first few olives that appear on his olive tree each season; bringing these first olives, once mature, to the temple; and then reciting a speech of gratitude (Deut. 26:5-10). This speech reviews the great events of the Exodus, which took place thousands of years in the past, implying that these events are in some way directly related to him. The believer speaks of the land that "You have given me." The earth belongs to G-d wherever I am living; each piece of land that belongs to me has been given to me, and I am to give thanks for each blessing I receive from this piece of land.

A person can only be truly happy if he appreciates what *Hashem* has given him. However, if a person is egocentric, considering himself deserving of all that he has, he will not be happy about what he has. Rather, he will be focused on those things which are not yet his, but to which he feels entitled. If a person goes through life with the attitude that everyone owes him, he will constantly be miserable, never satisfied with what he has.

According to Rabbi Noson Weisz, "Internalizing the message of *Parashat Ki Tavo* teaches a double lesson. As long as we are on a legitimate path of expression of our spiritual potential, the entire immensity of the revelations of the Exodus and its aftermath is ours to draw upon. We all live in the space between the blessings of *Bikurim* and the 98 curses."

YISRAEL AND TITHES

The Torah states: "When you have finished paying all the tithe of your produce in the third year, which is the year of tithing, giving it to the Levite, the sojourner, the fatherless, and the widow, so that they may eat within your towns and be filled, then you shall say before the L-rd your G-d . . ." (Deut. 26:12-13). The Yisraelites put aside three tithes from their income: 1) *Ma'aser Rishon* (first tithe) for the *Levites*; 2) *Ma'aser Sheni* (second tithe) for the poor, which teaches us to appreciate the purposes to which our assets should be directed – these purposes are the cultivation of the spirit, the care of the body and cultivation of loving our fellow men; and 3) the *Ma'aser Shlishit* (third tithe) for pilgrimages – tithes which had to be consumed in Jerusalem. Three thousand and five hundred years ago, the Jewish people already knew how to finance their vacations in Jerusalem!



APOSTOLIC WRITINGS

MARK 8:1-26

The strongest connection between this *parasha*, *Ki-Tavo*, and the *Besorah* of Mark chapter 8 is the matter of miracles. The people of Yisrael should be the first to recognize the blessings and miracles of G-d who multiplies the harvest in a land where nothing other than stones proliferate. Indeed, anyone who has lived in Yisrael knows that this country is difficult to cultivate. With no rain at all for about 7 months out of every year, and stones and rocks everywhere, it is difficult to understand how the people of Yisrael could survive and cultivate this "promised land." Today drip systems, factories for desalination of sea water and other modern irrigation methods help the land of Yisrael obtain and conserve its water resources. Even though the Promised Land was described as a land of milk and honey, today the agricultural crops that are grown mostly supply domestic needs, and Yisrael's economy today is essentially dependent on tourism and high technology.

Three thousand years ago, it was only through the blessings of the L-rd that Yisrael could produce enough fruits and vegetables to feed the millions of people who were living there. We therefore understand very well this *mitzvah* of thanksgiving described in the *parasha*, *Ki-Tavo*, where the people of Yisrael were instructed to bring offerings to the L-rd, a basket of the first fruits as a thanksgiving offering: "Place the basket before the L-rd your G-d and bow down before Him" (Deuteronomy 26:10). Miracles are the strong connection between this *parasha* and our *Besorah*, because in this text of Mark it is Yeshua who miraculously feeds G-d's people. Beginning with only a few fishes and seven loaves of bread, not only does he provide food that feeds four thousand people, but the disciples received back seven baskets of food: "Afterward the disciples picked up seven baskets full of broken pieces that were left over" (Mark 8:8). The message is clear: when G-d blesses His people, He does it in abundance and fullness (Deuteronomy 28:5-6). Yeshua is a living illustration of G-d's blessings when there is faithfulness. The statement of Deuteronomy 28:9-12 is not about salvation or rewards by works, it is a demonstration that the Torah and the *mitzvot* open a strong line of communication between G-d and His people, and in consequence of this good relationship the blessings of G-d can be openly received. The prophet Isaiah put it this way: "Behold, the L-rd's hand is not shortened, that it cannot save, or His ear dull, that it cannot hear; but your iniquities have made a separation between you and your G-d, and your sins have hidden His face from you so that He does not hear" (Isaiah 59:1-2). G-d wants to save, G-d wants to bless, but from time to time it is our disobedience that blocks G-d's blessings.

In the *Besorah* of Mark these principles are in action; Yeshua knows and understands the needs of everyone. A "large crowd with nothing to eat" (Mark 8:1a) were in front of Yeshua and he understood their need, but the disciples did not comprehend. This is not the first time they are out in the countryside with a large crowd – we remember that in chapter 6 of this *Besorah* of Mark, Yeshua fed five thousand: "They all ate and were satisfied, and the disciples picked up twelve baskets full of broken pieces and fish. Now there were five thousand men who ate the loaves." (Mark 6:42-44). Here again in chapter 8 it is Yeshua who takes the initiative: "Yeshua called the disciples. He said to them, 'I have compassion for the crowd, because they've stayed with Me for three days now and have nothing to eat.'" (8:1b-2). Just at the end of chapter 7 we saw Yeshua healing a deaf man – Yeshua seems to

never stop working, healing, relieving, feeding, meeting the needs of the people. And now in Chapter 8 he again has compassion for a large crowd and asks his disciples to feed them. Even though they have already seen Yeshua feeding the five thousand, it is still difficult for the *talmidim* to obey – they object that they don't know how to do that. Are we similar to the disciples, when from time to time we receive an order from G-d and we really don't know how to accomplish it: "How can one feed these people with bread here in the desert?" (Mark 8:4). It was not really a desert – they were close to the sea of Galilee, one of the best places in Yisrael to grow fruits and vegetables. In reality they were not interested in obeying their master's word. The crowd had already been with them for three days, they were tired and wanted to leave as soon as possible to get some rest. However, Yeshua knew exactly what to do and how to do it. "He asked them, 'How many loaves do you have?' They said, 'Seven.'" (8:5). In order to feed the crowd, it was important for the disciples to first discover their own limitations. As long as we think that we are able to do this and that on our own, we don't let G-d act in our life. Patiently, Yeshua teaches them what to do, and he is ready to repeat his teaching as long as the disciples don't understand that they must have compassion for the crowd – the disciples of Yeshua must always be ready to relieve suffering and pain. Now it seems that Yeshua repeats the same sequence we have seen in chapter 6. Yeshua asks them to be aware of what they have and what they don't have: they have "seven loaves." He then gives them an order: "Then he ordered the crowd to sit down on the ground" (8:6). Obedience is important – if the crowd or the disciples do not accept full obedience, the miracle cannot be done. "He took the seven loaves, and after giving thanks he broke them and gave them to his disciples to distribute; and they distributed them to the crowd" (8:7). For Yeshua, "seven" is enough to feed four thousand people: "They ate and were filled; and they took up the broken pieces left over, seven baskets full. Now there were about four thousand people. And he sent them away." (8:8-9). Once again, G-d's blessing meeting their need was more than enough.

Even though a great miracle has happened, some people were not satisfied: "The Pharisees came and began to argue with him, asking him for a sign from heaven, to test him" (8:11). We don't know if they did not witness the miracle of the loaves, or if they voluntarily chose to ignore it, but Yeshua did not satisfy their curiosity—there had already been more than enough signs. "And he left them, and getting into the boat again, he went across to the other side of the sea of Galilee" (8:13). What is our attitude when we encounter a miracle from the L-rd – are we able to recognize it in our life? From time to time perhaps we are like these Pharisees who witnessed a miracle but were not able to see it. May the L-rd help us to see and feel His actions in our life. Let's remember that most of the time, miracles are not spectacular; G-d is acting, G-d is present in our life. While miracles can take the appearance of natural events, G-d is there. Let's remember the story of Esther: we can read the book of Esther from the first to the last verse, and we will not see any mention of G-d. However we know God was there with Mordecai and Esther, and at the end of the story, when the Jewish people were saved, they all recognized the great miracle and established a feast to remember that miracle. It is important to discover the action of G-d in every moment of our life.

HAFTARAH

ISAIAH 60:1-22

Our text of comfort this week describes the future glory of G-d's people, when *Hashem* will shine upon them through His *shechinah* or *Ruach Hashem* (Holy Spirit) to witness their discovery of the glorious Messiah and His goodness for humanity. "Arise, shine, for your light has come! The glory of *Hashem* has risen on you" (Isaiah 60:1). The glory of G-d's people will be revealed only when the "glory of *Hashem*" rises upon them.

The metaphor of light is very important in Scripture. Light appears 209 times in the Bible, from the primordial light of Genesis 1:5 to the later light revealed in Revelation 21 when the sun will not be necessary anymore, because the world will be enlightened by the glory of *Hashem*: "And the city has no need for the sun or the moon to shine on it, for the glory of G-d lights it up, and its lamp is the Lamb" (Rev. 21:23). This event is also affirmed at the end of our Haftarah when Isaiah proclaims: "No more will the sun be your light by day, nor the glow of the moon be your light, but *Hashem* will be your everlasting light, and your G-d for your glory" (Isaiah 60:19). What a unity between the revelation of the prophets of the *Tanach* and the prophets of the Apostolic Writings!

In our Haftarah text, this light has almost been removed from the earth: "For behold, darkness covers the earth, and deep darkness the peoples" (Isaiah 60:2a) – this is the darkness of error, idolatry and apostasy. Light and darkness in the Bible are also metaphors for spirituality (light) or obscurity (darkness – the absence of light), and it is the role of G-d's people to bring back the light of G-d and spirituality on the earth: "But *Hashem* will arise upon you, and His glory will appear over you" (60:2b). The testimony of G-d's people will attract nations and kings to them and ultimately to G-d: "Nations shall come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your dawn" (60:3). Rabbi David Altshuler in *Metzudot* affirms, "And His glory will be seen upon you, His *shechinah* will be manifested in you." Such an experience happened when the *talmidim* of Yeshua received the *Ruach Hakodesh* (Holy Spirit) a few days after Yeshua ascended to heaven: "When the day of *Shavuot* had come, they were all together in one place. Suddenly there came from heaven a sound like a mighty rushing wind, and it filled the whole house where they were sitting. And tongues like fire spreading out appeared to them and settled on each one of them. They were all filled with the *Ruach ha-Kodesh* and began to speak in other tongues as the *Ruach* enabled them to speak out" (Acts 2:1-4). On that day and for the next few years, the light of G-d illuminated Jerusalem. But the inhabitants of Jerusalem missed a great opportunity, that of seeing the nations coming to them in order to receive the Torah: "Nations shall come to your light" (Isaiah 60:3). Instead, it was Yeshua's *talmidim* (disciples) who were dispersed out among the nations to bring the light of G-d to the nations.

"Lift up your eyes and look around; they all gather together, they come to you" (60:4). The believers who shine and bring the good news to the nations must lift up their eyes and look around to see this miracle happening. They will shine even more, they will be "radiant": "Then you shall see and be radiant; your heart shall thrill and rejoice, because the abundance of the sea shall be brought to you, the wealth of the nations shall come to you" (60:5).

STORIES AND TRADITIONS

WHATEVER G-D DOES IS FOR THE GOOD!

The Talmud relates that Rabbi Akiva would always say, "Whatever G-d does is for the good!" Once on a journey, Rabbi Akiva and his students were refused hospitality at a certain town and had to spend the night in a field. Yet, instead of being upset, Rabbi Akiva said: "Whatever G-d does is for the good!"

Rabbi Akiva had a donkey, a rooster to awaken him early, and a lamp for studying Torah. That evening, as he was studying, a wind blew out his lamp. Then a cat pounced on his rooster and ate it. Finally, a prowling lion ate his donkey. Again Rabbi Akiva said: "Whatever G-d does is for the good!"

Late that same night, marauding troops raided the unfriendly town and took all its inhabitants captive. The next morning, Rabbi Akiva and his students discovered what happened. He said to his students: "Didn't I tell you—whatever G-d does is for the good! If the lamp would have been burning or the rooster would have crowed, or the donkey would have brayed, we too, would have been taken captive."

Rabbi Zalmen Marozov gives us a lesson when he affirms that at times G-d's actions don't reveal any good at all. In situations like these one has to believe and trust in G-d that everything is for the ultimate good. "And you shall rejoice in all the good that the L-RD your G-d has given to you and to your house" (Deuteronomy 26:11).

MOSHE'S TEACHING

There's a Jewish legend that says Moshe came back down to earth early in the second century of the Common Era and visited Rabbi Akiva's

"When you come to the land that G-d your Lord is giving you as a heritage, occupying and settling it, you shall take the first of every fruit of the ground produced by the land that G-d your Lord is giving you. You must place it in a basket, and go to the site that G-d will choose as the place associated with His name."

(Deuteronomy 26:1,2)

schoolhouse. He sat quietly in the back row, incognito. Moshe was all ears. Rabbi Akiva lectured on an incredibly well-developed legal system that considered every interest, yet seemingly made room for every exception. It reflected a society that was profoundly human. Moshe was astounded that the children of Israel had come so far in their walk with *HaShem*. They were way beyond him! This guy Rabbi Akiva was so advanced in fairness and compassion that Moshe himself couldn't follow all the ins and outs of the discussion. At the end of the astounding exposition, Moshe meekly raised his hand—let's remember that according to the Torah, Moshe was the meekest man who ever lived on the face of the earth—and asked Rabbi Akiva where he had learned this teaching. Rabbi Akiva, who didn't know who he was talking to, said, "Why, don't you know? Every Jew knows. This is the Torah that *HaShem* gave our teacher Moshe on Mt Sinai. I learned it from him!"

HAVE YOU MADE A PLAN?

The story is told of two prisoners, condemned to death, being held for 6 months in the dungeon of a castle. On the day of execution, the lieutenant leads them down the corridor and up the stairs, level by level, until they come to the courtyard exit. They are taken to the wall, blindfolded, given their last cigarette and their hands are tied behind their backs. The lieutenant walks back to his firing squad and says, "Ready, aim ..." and one prisoner turns to the other prisoner and says, "Now here's my plan!"

What is your plan for this new year 5780?

INSPIRATIONAL CORNER

In order to encourage the people to come together for religious service, as well as to provide for the poor, God required a second tithing of all the increase. Concerning the first tithing, the Lord declared, "I have given the children of Levi all the tithes in Israel." (Numbers 18:21). For two years they were to bring the second tithing to the place where the sanctuary was established. After presenting a thank offering to God and a part to the priest, the givers were to use the rest of the amount for a religious feast in which the Levite, the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow should participate. (BOE 266)

