

D'var Torah for Ki Tavo

By Josh Jackson, 7th grade

This week's Torah portion is Ki Tavo. It begins with instructions to the Israelites about what they are supposed to do when they settle in the Land of Israel.

They should take the first fruit and bring it to the Koheyn, the priest in charge and make a declaration:

"My ancestor was a homeless Aramean. He went to Egypt with a small number of men and lived there as an immigrant, but it was there that he became a great, powerful, and populous nation. The Egyptians were cruel to us, making us suffer and imposing harsh slavery on us. We cried out to God, Lord of our ancestors, and God heard our voices, seeing our suffering, our harsh labor, and our distress. God then brought us out of Egypt with a strong hand and an outstretched arm with great visions and with signs and miracles. He brought us to this area, giving us this land flowing with milk and honey. I am now bringing the first fruit of the land that God has given me."

Why did the Torah command the Israelites to bring their first fruits to the Tabernacle? To show that they were thankful to G-d.

Why did the Israelites have to tell the story of their slavery and how G-d freed and brought them to Israel every time they brought their first fruits?

Repeating our People's story made sure that they would never forget the suffering of Egypt and the miracle of G-d bringing them home and never take the Land of Israel for granted.

Like our ancestors long ago, I too have a declaration that I would like to make on this my Bar Mitzvah day:

My mother was a wandering Ethiopian. After the First Temple was destroyed over 2500 years ago, she came to Ethiopia after passing through the Red Sea, Egypt, and Yemen. She was persecuted everywhere and settled in Gondor, far away from the main cities. There she and her people grew. There she suffered hate. There she dreamt of Jerusalem. She prayed and cried out to G-d.

In 1983, my mother was 8 years old and together with her mom and sister and many others, she walked in the middle of the night to avoid suspicion, not knowing how long the walk was going to take with only the clothes on her back, a little food and a few hidden valuables.

My mother and her family prayed and yearned to go home, to a place where they truly belonged. Eventually, they made it to Israel, the land flowing with milk and honey, and discovered that they were not the only Jews. They had brothers and sisters in Israel and throughout the world.

Now, I stand here on this special day to declare:

I am proud to be a Bar Mitzvah. Reaching this stage makes me feel closer to G-d. It is special to wear tefillin every day for davening. I am becoming a man.