

*Parashat Ki Tavo* (Deuteronomy 26:1-29:8)

Far-right nationalists (in any country) base their anti-immigrant stance on the assumption the current citizen-inhabitants actually own the land. *Parashat Ki Tavo* refutes that argument easily.

*Parashat Ki Tavo* opens with a conditional statement: “When you enter the land the Lord your God is giving you as a heritage, *viy’rishta v’yashavta ba*, and you possess it and dwell in it” (Deut. 26:1). The Kli Yakar (1550-1619; Rabbi Shlomo Ephraim ben Aaron Luntschitz) notes this phrase, *viy’rishta v’yashavta ba*, occurs only twice in the Torah — here in *Ki Tavo* and in the commandments for appointing a king (Deut. 17:14) — and asks what connects these two incidents. His answer is how the Israelites change once they conquer Canaan and settle there. They become complacent, “fat,” and arrogant. They become corrupted by the illusion of possession and develop an entitlement mentality.

The ritual of offering *bikkurim* (first fruits) that follows is designed to counter this tendency. By giving up the land’s first fruits, the Israelites acknowledge the source of their well-being, which is made abundantly clear in the opening verse: “that the Lord your God is giving you.” The Israelites can never actually own the land; they can only serve as stewards of a gift meant to provide for generations.

The Kli Yakar’s trenchant insight from 400 years ago is instructive: the land’s bounty, whether material, social, spiritual, or intellectual, is to be shared. Thomas Jefferson echoes this sentiment in a 1785 letter to James Madison: “The earth is given as a common stock for man to labor and live on.” *Ki Tavo* describes a real sharing economy; any group that presumes exclusive ownership has forgotten where it comes from.

*Gut Shabbos/Shabbat Shalom*