

# Ki Tavo

The whole of the forty-year experience of exodus and then wandering in the desert was intended to be a preparation for entering the "Promised Land". We know only too well what a difficult, trying, and occasionally disastrous experience it was. Nevertheless, it was a tremendous feat, holding the people together and forging a new constitution and a new national character. Finally arriving and beginning the process of settlement brought with it other challenges.

Initially an invading force reaps the benefits of what others have planted or built. But in time new crops and new buildings spring up, as the old is slowly overtaken and forgotten.

The ceremony of bringing the first fruits is designed to get the settlers to appreciate their good fortune and, at the same time, to remember the past. These two ideas complement each other. It is a principle of Jewish law that one should actually try to enjoy life. We are commanded many times to rejoice. "God does not come to a person through sadness or depression or laziness, but through joy." But it is also a principle not to enjoy anything without first thanking God.

Thanking for what? It is so easy to take things for granted. If we normally enjoy good health, only sickness makes us fully appreciate our good fortune. Unlike in other traditions, there is no concept that suffering is necessary (of course it happens and often without any clear reason) or that only through suffering can one come to appreciate good things. In Judaism one can manage pretty well without suffering or evil, if one is lucky enough to be able to live without them. But then the only way to really appreciate our good fortune is to see it as a gift from God and to be grateful for it.

The formula that we recite when we bring the first fruits is one specifically designed to get us to appreciate our good fortune. Only by referring to the past can one appreciate the present. A bit like enjoying the rewards of graduating after remembering how hard you studied beforehand. Sometimes one needs to appreciate how far one has come materially since earlier generations struggled to survive. This is as true of post-war generations as it was of post-Exodus generations. Some things haven't changed over four thousand years.