

## **Ki Tetse – 5743**

Last week, I wanted to make sure that, despite having a houseful of children and grandchildren, I had changed over the parochet or curtain of the Aron HaKodesh and the mentles or covers of the Torah scrolls to our traditional white adornments. There was a time when I could have done it all by myself but not anymore. I made a date with Tim Bishop, our caretaker, to meet me at a specific time to help me get the job done. While we were working away, Tim asked me all kinds of questions. Now remember that Tim has been in and around our building since long before he began in the job he has now. He used to help our former long-term caretaker, Alan Read, all the time. But he had never had an opportunity to ask questions before like he did last week. And what specifically did he express amazement about? That we had six Torah scrolls and that each of them contained the exact same texts but could still look so different. That got us off on a tangent about how we read through the same thing each and every year, from beginning to end.

We take this for granted, for sure. From the time we are able to comprehend what it is that the Torah reading comprises, we take it for granted that we read it through from beginning to end every year. It does not exactly resonate the way it did with me last Shabbat when I realized how close we are now to the very end of Numbers, Devarim, especially because Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur both occur on the Shabbat so, this year, we have to be that much closer to the very end than normal. When I thought about Tim's questions as I was preparing to sit down and right this morning's Davar Torah, I realized the uniqueness and the power of exactly what we do from one year to the next, one generation to the next, and even one

millennium to the next. What else in our lives, in our world, can we point to where the cycle is repeated just like that every single year? We go to libraries to take out books and no doubt, some books we might read over and over, through the years. Some movies now folks can boast about how often they have seen them. But if we are shul goers, we have been exposed to the same parshiot in excess of four score and ten years sometimes.

Last week, I pointed out that in Shoftim, Moses warns the people that, once in the promised land, they might want to have a king, but such a king should be required to literally scribe his own copy of the Torah so that he is familiarized with the body of laws and understands why certain things are ordained by HaShem. Imagine, if you will, such a king transcribing the text of today's parsha. He would be without benefit of all the commentaries we can read in order to understand precisely what it is that we are reading. If such a king had access to the commentary in our Eitz Chaim chumashim, he would see that right from the beginning, Ki Teste is nothing more than a collection of miscellaneous laws, seemingly unrelated the one to the next. Such a king would have to question the import of restrictions on building parapets and the treatment of the spoils of war and the tassels on garments.

Eventually however, he would get to a selection that reminds a man who has two wives, one who he loves and one who he does not love and is about to die and is leaving behind sons from both the wives that the eldest son, even if from the wife he does not love, is entitled to his double inheritance as the eldest of the children, regardless of the love or lack thereof of the husband and wife. If such a king has copied his own Torah, he will remember that that very thing happened to one of our forefathers. The end of the book of Genesis deals with the death of Jacob and the blessings gave to each of his sons. Such a king will remember the conflict between the sons

of Jacob by Leah and by Rachel and by Bilhah and Zilpha and how Jacob suffered but also how the brothers fought.

Then and only then will such a king be reminded of the lesson that the Torah tries to teach him and us – that every human life is important. That there are over-arching principles that we are meant to aspire to and comprehend from reading the Torah. Like the training of an animal, we need to repeat, over and over again, until it is internalized, what our tradition and faith are all about. One of those principles, I expounded upon last week – justice. But I also pointed out that we are to use justice to achieve justice. Each act is important, and each life is important. We are commanded to be a holy people and to be a light unto the nations of the world. WE can only be that if we are true to ourselves.

History is replete with examples of how we have been punished because we are a stubborn people and hold fast to our faith. How could we be anything else but if we didn't read and study Torah year in and year out. One has to be amazed, like Tim was that we read the Torah all the way through, that the scrolls we read from were donated by families who made their way from Eastern Europe to this stiebele between Lake Ontario and Lake Erie and are the exact duplicate of Torah scrolls they read from and learned from in the steibeles in Eastern Europe and in Babylon or the holy land. Our faith, as exemplified by these five books of Moses which we are soon finished reading through again, has given us strength and enabled us to survive so much. WE owe it to future generations to continue in the line of succession, just as we pray every day, every week, from generation to generation. Talk about miracles. It seems to me that nothing compares to this one. Shabbat shalom.