

PARSHAT KI TAVO
DEUTERONOMY 26:1-29:8
18 ELUL 5781/26 AUGUST 2021



Map

Painting by Jasper Johns (1961)

I am interested in “the idea of knowing an image rather than just seeing it out of the corner of your eye.”
The map of the United States is too often “seen and not looked at, not examined.” (Jasper Johns)

“We observe today not a victory of party but a celebration of freedom—symbolizing an end as well as a beginning—signifying renewal as well as change... Let the word go forth from this time and place, to friend and foe alike, that the torch has been passed to a new generation of Americans.”

(John F. Kennedy, Inaugural Address, January 20, 1961)

FIRST FRUITS FOR A NATION

1. The priest shall take the basket from your hands and set it down in front of the altar of Adonai your God. Then shall you declare before Adonai your God: “My father was a wandering Aramean, and he went down into Egypt with a few people and lived there and became a great nation, powerful and numerous....So Adonai brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm, with great terror and with signs and wonders. God brought us to this place and gave us this land, a land flowing with milk and honey; and now I bring the first fruits of the soil that You, Adonai have given me.” (Deuteronomy 26:4-10)

2. Covenant societies exist, not because they have been there a long time, nor because of some act of conquest, nor for the sake of some economic or military advantage. They exist to honor a pledge, a moral bond, an ethical undertaking. That is why telling the story is essential to a covenant society. It reminds all citizens of why they are there....A covenant is more than a myth of origin – like the Roman story of Romulus and Remus or the English story of King Arthur and his knights. Unlike a myth, which merely claims to say *what happened*, a covenant always contains a specific set of undertakings that bind its citizens in the present and into the future. (Rabbi Jonathan Sacks)

3. It shall be that if you listen to the voice of Adonai your God, to protect, to perform all of God’s commandments....Blessed shall you be in the city and blessed shall you be in the field...But it will be that if you do not listen to the voice of Adonai your God, to guard, to perform all God’s commandments....Accursed will you be in the city and accursed will you be in the field. (Deuteronomy 28:1-3, 15-16)

4. They came here – the exile and the stranger....They made a covenant with this land. Conceived in justice, written in liberty, bound in union, it was meant one day to inspire the hopes of all mankind, and it binds us still. If we keep its terms, we shall flourish. (Lyndon B. Johnson, Inaugural Address, January 20, 1965)

5. Covenant societies – of which the USA is the supreme contemporary example – are *moral* societies, meaning not that their members are more righteous than others but that they see themselves as publicly accountable to certain moral standards that are part of the text and texture of their national identity. They are honoring the obligations imposed upon them by the founders. (Rabbi Jonathan Sacks)

6. Be attentive [חֲשֹׁבֶה, *hasket*] and hear, O Israel: This day you have become a people to Adonai, your God. (Deuteronomy 27:9)

The word *hasket* is to be read as a composite of *asu kittot kittot*, “Form yourselves into many groups” and occupy yourselves with Torah, since its knowledge can be acquired only in companionship with others. (Talmud, Berachot 63b)