**KI TAVO**

Our parsha this week is Ki Tavo. Deuteronomy 26:12 to 28:6

A summary of the parsha is :

Every three years, you are to set aside in full, the tenth part of your yield, and you are to give it to the Levite, the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow. You are to observe all the instructions given by Moses. If you do not obey God’s instructions, you shall be cursed. If you obey the Lord, your God, and observe faithfully all His Commandments, you shall be blessed.

The blessings I like. The curses – Not so much. So, in order to avoid them, I have decided to concentrate on just the first two verses of the parsha:

Deuteronomy 26:12 and 13 says:

When you have set aside in full the tenth part of your yield – in the third year of the tithe – and have given it to the Levite, the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow, that they may **eat their fill** in your settlements,

Then you shall say before the Lord, your God, “ I have removed the holy portion from the house, and I have also given it to the Levite, the stranger, the orphan, and the widow, according to all Your commandments that You commanded me; I have not transgressed Your commandments, **nor have I forgotten them**. “

The Levite, the stranger, the fatherless, the orphan, and the widow were all economically dependent on the people of Israel for their sustenance. For their survival.

In Canada, around 45000 children are orphans. Orphans are deprived of their first line of protection – their parents.

Sherlock and Culbert wrote an article in the Vancouver Sun in 2015. I sincerely hope that, three years later, things have improved for our orphaned youths. They wrote:

“ Imagine telling your children on their 19th birthdays that they must leave the family home, will receive no more financial or emotional support, and are on their own to figure out how to make money or go to school.

That is the reality for 700 youths every year in B.C. – foster children raised by the Ministry for Children and Families who, on their 19th birthdays, lose all the supports on which they had come to rely.

For some youths that means being forced out of a foster home or group home, where a family or non-profit agency provided them with shelter, food, clothing and guidance.

 For many, it means losing the $1000 a month provided by the ministry to pay their own rent and support themselves. In both scenarios, the youths also abruptly lose contact with any government social workers or transition workers who give advice and free food vouchers and bus tickets until age 19. Ontario has extended it to age 21.

Foster children are often among the most vulnerable kids in our society. They either have no parents or have been taken from their parents by the child welfare system or the courts. They have not been adopted, so are being raised by the state.

Sadly, these vulnerable youth, are more likely to end up on welfare and live in precarious housing, abuse alcohol and drugs, get arrested and jailed, drop out of High School, and have fragile social support networks.

The last contact they have with their guardianship social worker is driving in the car to a shelter.”

**Let’s not forget them. They need a miracle.**

But the ones in foster care are the lucky ones. Each year, thousands of our children run away from home and end up on the streets. Why? Most cited reason: Sexual, physical and psychological mistreatment. A significant number of children without parental support end up getting trapped in a vicious cycle of drug abuse, gang life and violence. In Vancouver, roughly 75 per cent of the city’s street young people use crystal meth, a dangerous drug.

But, it is not just the children who are affected. The whole society is.

According to research published in the Review of General Psychology of The American Psychological Association, Inc,

Father-deprived children are:

* 72% of all teenage murderers
* 60% of rapists
* 70% of kids incarcerated
* 3 out of 4 teen suicides
* 80% of the adolescents in psychiatric hospitals
* 90% of runaways

**Let’s not forget them. They need a miracle.**

Included among the vulnerable of society are refugees. When I say refugees, you are probably thinking of people in war-torn countries. But, across Canada, a woman is killed every six days by her intimate partner. 3000 more flee their homes each night, seeking refuge in our shelters.

In 2015, the Globe and Mail reported that “On a typical day, 231 shelters across the country report helping 3,781 women and 2,508 children. Some shelters are filled to capacity and must find alternative emergency accommodation for women and families.

Housing is a crucial issue for women seeking to get away from violent relationships; the lack of affordable accommodation is a key reason they often return to abusive partners. These women become refugees in an overcrowded system.

**Let’s not forget them. They need a miracle.**

I would like to end with some words from Rabbi Reuven Firestone:

“The commandment to care for the stranger is mentioned more times than any other commandment in the Torah – more even than the command to love God (v’ahavta). According to the Talmud, Rabbi Eliezer the Great noted that “the Torah warns 36 times, and some say 46 times, not to oppress the stranger” ( Babylonian Talmud, Bava M’tzia 59b).

The Torah reminds us repeatedly to remember the suffering of the stranger by reminding us that we ourselves suffered as strangers in ancient Egypt…We live today in a world where many nations treat their strangers – their minorities – as the ancient Egyptians treated our ancestors in Egypt. In rare occasions, oppression is relieved by the direct and miraculous power of the Creator. More often, oppression is relieved in other ways: through the grace of God’s likeness in the faces of helping neighbours – or helping strangers.

God’s miracles in Egypt are a metaphor for the miracles of human kindness that can happen anywhere and at any time. In times of great stress, the miracle is greater than at times of ease.

As Jews who know the suffering of the oppressed, we are especially obligated to reach out to the strangers in our midst, and to welcome those who flee the horrors of tyranny and persecution.”

**Let us remember them. Let us be their miracle.**