

Torah Portion Ki Tavo

Shabbat beginning September 16, 2022

David Kirk Dirlam

Ki Tavo is an ideal parshah for reading before major transformations, whether personal or historical. It tells of Moses' instructions to the Israelites upon entering the promised land.

On the personal level this approach applies to children becoming adults, a friend getting married, a colleague getting a new job, or a patient facing a difficult recovery. The instructions model the methods open to parents, teachers, counselors, and friends who care for someone facing change. They begin by urging gratitude. Next, they describe ways to remember important guidelines. Finally, these guidelines are emphasized with recounting of blessings for following and curses for ignoring them. Moses' methods articulate gratitude, principles, rewards, and warnings.

Transformations in society could also benefit from this approach. For example, today some see science replacing religion. But science should be grateful to religion for without its principles like truthfulness, service to the unfortunate, care for the earth, and welcoming the stranger, science collapses into personal power games. But religion needs science as well for without science, religion risks collapsing into dogmatism.

So, both historical and personal transformations are aided by gratitude, reminders of principles, rewards, and warnings. The Torah's Moses is a great teacher.