CONSIDER THE SEED
Ki Tavo: Deuteronomy 26-28
Rabbi Dan Moskovitz – Temple Sholom
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This parsha contains one of the only prayers found in the entire Torah. The prayer is a ritual where the Israelites after gathering their first fruits, and presenting them to the priests as an offering must then declare. "My father was a wandering Aramean. He went down to Egypt with meager numbers and sojourned there; but there he became a great and very populous nation… The Egyptians oppressed us and we cried to God and God heard our plea and freed us, and brought us to this land flowing with milk and honey. And now, look at me, the son of a wandering fugitive, I am now able to bring the first fruits of my field, grown in the soil that you God have given me." The text doesn't add but we are compelled to add, "O how my life has changed and how greatly am I blessed!"

Maimonides teaches us that this ritual was created to remind us and teach us humility, that people who amass fortunes and live in comfort often fall victim to self-centered excesses and arrogance. They tend to abandon ethical considerations because of increasingly selfish concerns. But bringing a harvest basket of first fruits, reciting a prayer that reiterates our humble beginnings and how far we have come, this promotes humility.

What are first fruits? They are not merely the product of our own sweat and labor, but the product of a partnership with God, our partnership with a string of God's messengers and helpers and angels who guided us along the way to the harvest. For had we not been freed from the land, had God not heard our cries and lead us to this land,

and given us leaders and helpers along the way Moses and Aaron, and even those that challenged us and threatened us but made us stronger, and then had God not given it to us and encouraged us when we doubted ourselves and our own abilities, and given us others who believed in us Joshua and Caleb and had it not truly been a good land, a land worth all the struggle and hardship then what we would have planted would never have borne fruit.

But what we planted did bear fruit, it did sprout and grow and flourish. Not only because of our hard work but because of God's messengers along the way, because of God's angels, because of God's blessing, even when the blessing may have at times seemed like a curse or a challenge or a hardship. No our first fruits are not solely

ours they are ours with the help of God, with the help of others, with Gods blessing.

What is the modern day equivalent of first fruits? What is the evidence that you made it, that you survived, that you took the raw materials that God gave you, an intellect, a drive, a creative mind, dedication, perseverance and made something of that. What is the tangible evidence that in spite of meager and precarious beginnings you arrived with God's help and the help of those who care about you to be who you are, where you are, what you are today?

You got a new car this year? It's your first fruits! How did you get the car? What's the story, you got a raise at work and that meant you could afford the car. But to get the raise you had to travel more and put in more hours, who

watched the kids so you could do that? Who sacrificed time with you so you could achieve and succeed? Your spouse, your kids. And how did you get such an understanding partner in life? And who raised them to be that way, to be such a partner such a soul mate.

You overcame a challenge this past year, you conquered a personal demon, you endured a heart rending loss. Who helped you do that? Did your boss give you time, did your friend give you a supportive ear, did your family come to be by your side.

First fruits are first planted.

We have got to roll back the story find the seed, find the thing that helped you grow and flourish and then the

mitzvah is to say thank you. Not for the fruit but for the seed and for all that went into helping it grow.

This is the season of lists, what we did wrong our sins, who we need to seek forgiveness from, who we need to forgive, relationships we need to repair. Even among menschen, among good and righteous people our lists are long.

But now is also the time for another list, what we are blessed with our first fruit and how we got them. Now is the time to say thank you and redeem those first fruits, to pay back the people, the forces in our lives for the success we have enjoyed the blessing we have been given.

My father was a clothing salesman, my mother a school teacher, they raised me in a good home, they showed me a

love for Judaism, they were strict with me but fair, they sent me to University, in moments of darkness and sorrow they and my friends supported me and raised my spirits. I became a rabbi, and have been fortunate to be embraced, accepted, challenged and pushed by my congregations. I met an incredible person who became my partner and soul-mate, we were blessed with children who greet us with a smile every morning and me with in-laws who now travel internationally to be with us and celebrate their 60th wedding anniversary! Mazel Tov!

The seed that was planted long ago was nurtured and helped to grow and to flourish and I am compelled by our tradition and common sense not just to eat of its fruit but to thank everyone along the way who nurtured it into being.

What is the story of your seed that grew in to your first fruits? What is the root source of your blessings, your successes.

Tonight, we enter into S'lichot, we open the gates to the New Year; the Gates of Repentance, we are thus commanded to reflect on our mistakes, and we should, we need too. We are good at that, we seldom need reminding to dwell on our misdeeds, but how are you at counting your blessings?

Consider the seed that grew into the fruit that makes your life so sweet, that needs tending too.