

Shabbat Parashat Ki Tavo
My Father Was a Wandering Aramean

The title of this week's *d'var* Torah might ring a bell for many, if not most, of us. It is one of the most well-known phrases that emerges from the retelling of the Exodus from Egypt, which we read in the *haggadah* each year at the *Pesah* seder. While sitting around the table with family and friends, we are reminded of our deepest of Jewish roots, from where we came all those centuries ago, and what transpired in order to make the miraculous Exodus from Egypt possible. No matter how far along in our history we get, we always take pains to go all the way back to our meager beginnings as an Israelite nation to be moved by how far we have come and how long we have been able to survive. Being reminded to go back to and remember our roots is an important lesson for us not only in our Jewish ritual lives, but for our day-to-day lives as well.

We have opened a new school year here at VTT with many very exciting changes. Our unit of four portable classrooms has opened to house our Grade 4 students, our library and computer lab have been integrated into a refurbished Learning Commons, the recess schedules have been altered to provide separate primary and intermediate recess times with enough room for every one to play...These are the most notable of the changes. However, as is true with everything Jewish, change and evolution are always counterbalanced with tradition. In a school that has been in existence for over 70 years in our community, we have much in the way of institutional memory and tradition to renew when we arrive back to school each year. In the same way as the farmer who recites the tale of the wandering Aramean as he presents his first fruits at the Temple, at our school opening assemblies this year, we reminded our students of a number of our important school traditions and aspects of our school culture and ways of life.

For 2012-2013 and the upcoming Jewish year of 5773, our school community is focusing on maintaining and strengthening our school culture's characteristic of *derekh eretz*/"respect." From being attired in proper school uniform to our attentiveness and participation during the singing of anthems, to the way that we all interact with each other, our school and the wider environment, respect will be at the forefront of our minds and the driving force behind the ways that we conduct ourselves. It takes only a moment of pause to be sure that we are making respectful decisions in our behavior, but it is often so easy to forget to do so. I encourage all of us to discuss *derekh eretz* in our homes in order to make connections to concepts, ideas and values that get raised at school. If we can all take a few extra moments, especially as we are preparing for the upcoming Jewish New Year of Rosh Hashana, to make *derekh eretz* a focus in our lives, imagine what kind of a difference and change for the good that we could make in all of our surroundings!

As we welcome this first Shabbat of the 2012-2013 school year, I welcome both new and returning families to our school this year and hope that we all have a year full of learning, love, and *derekh eretz*.

Shabbat Shalom!