

**This Week's Shabbat message from Rabbi Rheins:
*Shabbat Ki Tavo: The list of Blessings and Curses***

The Sin of Sexual Violence That Curses Our Society

As our ancestors prepared to enter the Promised Land, the Torah records a powerful ritual they performed. They were instructed to set up large stones (steles), coat them with plaster and inscribe upon them words of Torah. There is speculation as to whether the instruction was to write all the words of the Book of Deuteronomy or just selected chapters. Surely, the steles would contain the powerful blessings and curses contained in chapter 28.

It is natural for us to gravitate towards words of blessings: *Blessed shall you be in the city and blessed shall you be in the country.... Blessed shall be you in your comings and blessed shall you be in your goings.* (Deuteronomy 28:3; 28:6)

But in addition to the blessings, this week's Torah portion, *Ki Tavo*, also contains long lists of curses and dire consequences if we fail to live up to the ethical and moral ideals that form the foundation of our covenantal relationship with God and with each other. The curses are not randomly thrown down at us from on high. Rather, we are the ones who bring the curses upon ourselves.

Most recently, we have once again been shocked and horrified to learn of the extent of pedophilia and sexual abuse by Catholic priests. Years after the first revelations of these monstrous deeds, ever more evidence of unspeakably heinous sexual crimes against the weak and vulnerable is leaked out. We must say "leaked out" because the enormous payments of hush money coupled with social pressures and stigma have forced all but a few of these thousands of victims to remain silent --- until now.

These crimes come as our entire society is just beginning to address the lessons taught by the MeToo movement. We are finally waking up to the shameful reality of the culture of inappropriate sexual contact, comments and attitudes.

These acts of sexual violence and intimidation are not just a problem for the Catholic church. These acts of sexual violence and intimidation are not just a problem for Hollywood. These acts of sexual violence and intimidation are not just the problem of those faceless "others" out there. Rather, these acts of sexual violence and intimidation are problems that curse each and every one of us.

We will take time for a special prayer and message on the issue of sexual violence at this week's *Erev Shabbat* service (6pm). On Saturday night (7pm), our *Selichot* study and discussion will also focus on this issue. These are important opportunities to learn, to share (in confidence) and to begin to create a new culture---a culture that simply will no longer tolerate violent and intimidating sexual acts. It is time to eliminate that curse which plagues us.

Ken Yehi Ratzon, With God's help, let it be so,