

PORTION	DATE	HEB DATE	TORAH	NEVIIM	KETUVIM
Vezot Habrachah	2 Oct 2018	23 Tishrei 5779	Deut. 33:1-34:12	Jos. 1:1-18	Acts 1:1-14

This week's Torah portion, Vezot Haberachah means "This is the blessing." It is Moshe's final farewell address to the Yisraelites, then followed by the vision Hashem had shown him to the people in their land, and finally the account of his death. The Midrash teaches that Moshe continued the tradition when Ya'akov blessed his sons. Just as Ya'akov's blessing to his sons closes both the account of his life and the book of Genesis, Moshe also closes the account of his life and "his" book of Deuteronomy.

The Midrash¹ starts with a question. If one was leading a prayer and erred, should he be replaced by another? If he erred and omitted a blessing, where does he start back from? These are the questions asked by the sages during the Talmudic times. During that period, this issue was very critical as they recite the blessings from a memory. It is obvious the erred reader will be replaced with a new reader by following the examples of the Patriarchs. But the question is where do a new reader start from?

It is written, "Abraham gave all that he had to Yitzchak." (Gen. 25:5) The simplest explanation is that Abraham gave everything that he had to Isaac. But this is not true. Because he gave gifts to his other sons (from Keturah) and sent them away. (Gen. 25:6) So what did Abraham give? R' Yehudah said that Abraham gave Isaac the birthright to perform the sacrificial services associated with the birthright. R' Nechemyah said that Abraham blessed Yitzchak with the blessing that Hashem bestowed upon Abraham when He said, "You will be a blessing." (Gen. 12:2) Meaning, Hashem had given Abraham the power to bless others. It is this power that Abraham bestowed upon Yitzchak.

When Yitzchak blessed Ya'akov, "And may Hashem give you." (Gen. 28:28) Since the context of "give" also means "blessing", the sages conclude that Yitzchak picked up the "blessing" where Abraham left off by saying, "And may Hashem give you."

When Ya'akov arose to bless his sons, he said, "I shall commence my blessing of my sons with nothing other than 'calling for them,'" as it is stated, "Then Ya'akov called for his sons." (Gen. 49:1) And with "this," as it is stated, "And this is what their father spoke to them." (Gen. 49:28)

When Moshe arose to bless the people of Yisrael, he also said, "I shall commence my blessing with none other than the word 'this.' Thus our verse says, "And 'this' is the blessing." וְזֹאת הַבְּרָכָה (Deut. 33:1)

Now, another question arises. We just learned that Moshe had the power to bless the people. But, did Moshe have the right to bless the people of Yisrael? The answer is found in Psalms 24:3-5. "Who shall ascend into the mountain of YHWH? and who shall stand in His holy place? He that hath clean hands, and a pure heart; who hath not taken My name in vain, and hath not sworn deceitfully. He shall receive a blessing from YHWH, and righteousness from the Elohim of his salvation."

"Who shall ascend into the mountain of YHWH?" Moshe, as said "Moshe ascend to Elohim." (Exo. 19:3)

"And who shall stand in His holy place?" Moshe, as said "For the place upon which you stand is holy ground." (Exo. 3:5)

"He that has clean hands?" Moshe, as said, "I have not taken the donkey of any one of them." (Num. 16:15)

¹ The Midrash, Chapter 11

“And pure heart?” Moshe, as said, “Why, Hashem should Your anger flare up against Your people?” (Exo. 32:11) The Midrash explains Moshe’s heart was pure because his question was not a challenge, as he was not requesting his own need, but the need of the people.

“Who hath not taken My name in vain.” The proper translation is “Who has not taken one’s life in vain.” Moshe has taken a life of an Egyptian. The sages explain that the Egyptian forced upon another man’s wife and he was intended to kill her husband. Therefore, Moshe consulted with the angels and stood on judgment and acted righteously.

“And has not sworn deceitfully.” Moshe stayed with Yitro and kept the promise that he will dwell with Yitro. When Hashem called upon Moshe, he went to Yitro to ask for permission to leave. (Exo. 4:18)

“And he shall receive a blessing.” Moshe received a power to convey the blessing the people because of all the reasons above.

Why did Moshe merit that Hashem should busy Himself to bury Moshe? When Hashem went down to Egypt for the time of redemption of Yisrael had come, all Yisraelites were busy collecting gold and silver, Moshe went around the city for three days and three nights looking for the coffin of Yosef because Yosef bound them with an oath to take him out of Mitzrayim. (Gen. 50:25)

After Moshe tired himself out, a certain Segulah (Serah, the daughter of Asher) came upon him, and said, “My master, why are you tired?” Moshe replied, “For three days and three nights, I went around in search of Yosef’s coffin. But I could not find it.” She said, “Follow me. I will show you where it is.” She took him to the Nile River and said, “The magicians and the astrologers made for him [Yosef] a coffin of 500 talents of gold and casted it to the river. And they told the Pharaoh, ‘If it is your wish that this people [Yisrael] should never leave this place, then as long as they will not find the bones of Yosef, they can not leave.’”

Immediately, Moshe said, “Yosef, Yosef, you know how you have adjured Yisrael, Hashem will surely remember you; give honor to the Elohim of Yisrael and do not hold up the redemption of Yisrael. You have good deeds to your credit, intercede then with your Creator and come up from the depths.” Whereupon Yosef’s coffin rose up. Moshe took the coffin on his shoulder and carried it while all Yisrael followed him. For this, Hashem said, “Moshe, you say that you have done a small thing; by your life, this act of kindness is a great thing; since as your ignored silver and gold, I too will do to you this kindness in that I will busy Myself with your burial.”

We have learned in the past that before giving of the Ten Commandments in Mount Sinai, Hashem went to the other nations and offered the Commandments which they rejected. The evidence is found in verse 2 which says, “YHWH came from Senai, and rose up from Seir to them; He shone forth from Mount Paran, and He came with ten thousands of kidushim (holiness): from His Right Hand went a fiery Torah for them.” Hashem went to Seir where the descendants of Esau (Edomites) lived and offered the Commandments which they refused. He then went to Paran where the descendants of Yishmael lived and offered the same Commandments which they also refused. And Hashem along with His hosts came upon Mount Sinai and offered the Commandments which the Yisraelites accepted without hesitation even before hearing the Commandments. Thus they became Hashem’s “chosen nation.”

The Zohar² teaches that Esau and Yishmael are the spiritual progenitors of the seventy nations. When their descendants rejected the Commandments, all the other nations followed suit. We can learn from here that when a person wishes to attain Torah understanding, he must first eliminate his evil characteristics.³

² Zohar, III, p. 193a

³ Likutey Moharan I, 101:2

What does “a fiery Torah” mean? When Hashem gave the Torah, it was given in the form of black fires [the letters] on white fire [the background].⁴ The black represents ‘form,’ which can be grasped. The white represents spiritual consciousness. Meaning, although we can understand ‘the black fire,’ the ‘white fire’ of Torah exists on levels beyond our comprehension. The ‘black fire’ is revealed and ‘white fire’ is hidden.

In verse 3, it says, “He loveth the peoples, all His holy ones--they are in Thy hand; and they sit down at Thy feet, receiving of Thy words.” Hashem “loves the people” who were distant and through repentance have come closer to Hashem. They draw strength to reject their previous lives from “all His holy ones,” who were righteous. Who were the righteous? They were Abraham, Yitchak, Ya’akov, Yosef, Moshe, Aaron, and David. Each generation has a righteous leader who embody their characteristics. Thus “his hands were faith.” (Exo. 17:12) “They” are the Torah scholars who goes around town to town or elsewhere to study and teach the Torah for they rectify the air around them with their Torah study.

In verse 4, it says, “Moshe commanded us a law, an inheritance of the congregation of Jacob.” The Mishnah states, “Make yourself fit to study the Torah, for it is not yours by inheritance.”⁵ The Torah unites the people for this unites them with Hashem. When we can be truly called a community, then the Torah is ours by inheritance. But if we try to attain Torah as individuals, we must prepare ourselves for a struggle.⁶

In verse 5, according to R’ Yehudah Halevi, the Torah itself is the king, for it is Israel’s ultimate authority. When Scripture laments ‘there was no king in Israel (Judg. 18:1)’, it means that the people lagged in their obedience to the Torah. If one says that he believes in Hashem but not in His Torah is the same as denying Hashem Himself, for a king without authority is not a king.

A community is not achieved by all personality of a group becoming alike, but by each one fulfilling its unique purpose and acknowledging the necessity and contribution of all the other personality. An example can be our body. Each organs and limb depend on each other to become one, yet they maintain its individuality to function and contribute to other parts of the body to be one. While it is worthwhile to have a common goal even though it is a worthy goal to achieve, it is a symbiotic relationship that completes each other.

In verse 6, Moshe blesses Reuben that he lives in this world and not die spiritually in the World to Come. Reuben requires such a blessing because Ya’akov had chastised him for violating the bed of Bilhah (Gen. 35:22) (Rashi). Furthermore, that the tribe would not cut off from Yisrael, but be counted among the number of tribes of Yisrael.

In verse 7, Moshe says, “This is the blessing of Yahudah: and he said, Listen, YHWH, to the voice of Yahudah, and bring him to his people: let his hands be sufficient for him; and be a help to him from his enemies.” Why would Moshe beseech Hashem to listen ‘to the voice of Yahudah’? What does it mean to ‘bring him to his people’ and ‘let his hands be sufficient for him?’

There are two versions why Moshe would start his blessing in such manner. First version, the sages explain that when Yahudah was trying to convince his father, Ya’akov that Benjamin should accompany them to Mitzrayim to purchase more food, Yahudah swore to his father that he would die if he did not bring Benjamin back alive. Even though Benjamin did come back with Yahudah, the vow could not be annulled until he died. (Exod. 12:36) Ever since then, no one thought of a legal argument that could annul his vow.

⁴ Rashi, Yerushalmi, Shekalim, 6:1

⁵ BT, Avot 2:12

⁶ Likutey Halakhot VIII, p. 139a

Therefore, his bones were rolling around in his coffin indicating he was denied of entry into the afterlife. So, as soon as Moshe uttered these words, Yahudah's bones reassembled into a complete skeleton and no longer rolled around in the coffin indicating he entered the afterlife.

Another version is when Yahudah sinned by entering Tamar. During their sojourn in the desert, his bones continued to roll about in his coffin until Moshe beseeched Hashem for mercy by saying that Yahudah confessed his sin when he admitted he had fathered Tamar's child (Gen. 38:26). Yahudah's bones were restored and no longer rolled about.

Each Torah (Law) is comprised of a certain configuration of letters. When a person sin, he destroys the law's positive letter-combination and forms a negative letter-combination, which is then etched upon his bones. By confessing his sin and through *teshuvah*, the letter disappear from his bones and are transformed into the words of confession.

Now, Moshe did not bless Simeon explicitly, because he felt that they played a leading role at Shittim. (Num. 25:1-15) And they were less worthy to be blessed than the other tribes. However, he included them in the blessing of Yahudah when Moshe said, "Listen" (Shema) which is the source for the name of Simeon (Shimon) (Gen. 29:33). This connection between these two tribes was evident when the tribe of Simeon was included in that of the tribe of Yahudah. (Jos. 19:9)

(시 24:3) 여호와와 산에 오를 자가 누구며 그의 거룩한 곳에 설 자가 누구인가

(시 24:4) 곧 손이 깨끗하며 마음이 청결하며 뜻을 허탄한 데에 두지 아니하며 거짓 맹세하지 아니하는 자로다

(시 24:5) 그는 여호와께 복을 받고 구원의 하나님께 의를 얻으리니