

The Narrow Bridge

גשר צר מאוד

PARSHA PERSPECTIVES

Short Divrei Torah on Parshas V'zos HaBerachah

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לע'נ פּעסל בת ישראל מנחם / לזכות חילינו

SWEET AND SATISFYING

Baal Shem Tov

"And this is the blessing with which Moshe, the man of G-d, blessed the Children of Israel before his death..." (33:1)

Dovid HaMelech describes the words of the Torah by stating (Tehillim 19:11): "They are more desirable than gold, even much fine gold; and sweeter than honey, than drippings from the combs."

Everyone desires gold, yet no one is content with the amount he possesses. Honey is exceedingly sweet but is unpleasant to the one who is satisfied. The Torah, however, is both satisfying and pleasant.

FOCUSING ON THE POSITIVE

Rabbi Shlomo Ressler

"And this is the blessing with which Moshe, the man of G-d, blessed the Children of Israel before his death..." (33:1)

The last parashah in the Torah starts with a conjunction, "And this is the blessing which Moshe... blessed the Jewish people before his death" (33:1). The previous paragraph in the Torah was G-d telling Moshe to go up to the mountain and die there because his punishment will preclude him from entering the land of Israel. Why is the Torah drawing a connection from G-d's punishment to Moshe's last words?

Rav Shimon Schwab clarifies that despite the possibility of Moshe's blaming the Jewish people for his punishment, not only was Moshe not angry about his predicament, but he actually felt the urge to bless them. Perhaps this conjunction highlights Moshe's genuine love for his people: despite not being allowed to enter the land, nothing even remotely resembling anger or resentment entered his mind.

This focus on the positive is a noble message for the final chapter of Moshe's journey and a worthy message to perpetuate.

FORGIVENESS AND BLESSINGS

Tzror HaMor

"And this is the blessing with which Moshe, the man of G-d, blessed the Children of Israel before his death..." (33:1)

Why is Moshe called a "man of G-d" in this pasuk? To show his G-d-like virtues. Moshe was not to be permitted to enter the Land of Israel, as the preceding parashah ends with the words "but you shall not enter into the land that I give to the Children of Israel" (32:52). Moshe himself stated that this tragedy had befallen him because of the Jewish people's behavior, as the verse (3:26) states, "But G-d was angry with me for your sake." Thus, one might think that the Jews were not worthy of being blessed by him. Therefore, the Torah goes on to tell us that Moshe - faithful leader that he was - did not permit himself to be influenced by such considerations, but instead blessed his people. "And this is the blessing with which Moshe... blessed the Children of Israel."

Moshe is described at this point in the narrative as a "man of G-d" because he acted "in G-d's image," forgiving the sins of his people and blessing them.

FOR ALL TO KNOW

Imrei Emes

"And this is the blessing with which Moshe, the man of G-d, blessed the Children of Israel before his death..." (33:1)

Why hasn't Moshe been described as "the man of G-d" earlier in the Torah?

Until that point Moshe, who was "exceedingly humble," had not wanted to write these words about himself. However, it was intended that future generations would know who Moshe had been, and that it was through him that the Jews had received the Torah. Hence, while Moshe had not wanted to describe himself in such laudatory terms before, he had to do it now, "before his death." For, in the words of Hillel, "If not now, when?"

STICK WITH THE TZADDIK

Amshinover Rebbe

“And this is the blessing with which Moshe, the man of G-d, blessed the Children of Israel before his death...” (33:1)

The essence of the blessing was that a Jew should always be with a “man of G-d,” the Tzaddik of that generation.

ALWAYS BY OUR SIDE

Premishlaner Rebbe

“And this is the blessing with which Moshe, the man of G-d, blessed the Children of Israel before his death...” (33:1)

Though Moshe was a “man of G-d,” it was a blessing for him and for the people that his concern for the Children of Israel was never deflected. Being a “man of G-d,” he was always with the Children of Israel.

NEVER ALONE

Radomsker Rebbe

“He said, ‘Hashem came from Sinai...’” (33:2)

These words have the same meaning as stated in Shemos (19:20): “And Hashem came down upon Har Sinai.” The reason for the going down is that Hashem was accepting the fact that even when a generation is at a low level in Torah, He will not abandon them. (Tiferet Shlomo, p. 300)

CHOSEN BY HASHEM

Reb Noson of Breslov

“He said, ‘Hashem came from Sinai, radiated forth to them from Seir, He appeared from Mount Paran, and He came with part of the sacred myriads...’” (33:2)

G-d desired that everyone should have the Torah. When He brought it to the nations, however, they rejected it. (Avodah Zarah 2b)

When G-d offered the Torah to the nations, He brought with it thoughts of repentance. But the nations did not want to arouse themselves to receive the Torah, and rejected it. When G-d offered the Torah to the Jews, they received the illumination of repentance and agreed to accept the Torah. In this way, the Jews became G-d’s “chosen nation,” a concept that defies logic. The Jews are called an “am segulah” (עַם סְגוּלָה, special nation) because a segulah (סְגוּלָה, propitious remedy) defies human understanding (see Likutey Moharan I, 21:8).

How can one nation be “chosen” over all the others? The same question applies in each generation: Why do some people follow the true path, while others who want to serve G-d follow paths that are not always the right ones? In truth, G-d reveals Himself to everyone. Commensurate with how much a person is willing to sacrifice for G-d, he merits to a revelation of G-dliness. In this manner, he will merit to be “chosen” by G-d. (Likutey Halakhot I, p. 1192)

AN ORAL LAW

Mekor Baruch

“...from His right hand He presented a fire of law to them...” (33:2)

One day the author of the scholarly treatise Toras Yekusiel was asked to explain to him where the Oral Tradition is alluded to in the Written Law.

“The words ‘daas lumo - a law for them,’ contain the letters of the Hebrew word ‘Talmud,’” the sage replied. “This is to teach us that immediately after the Written Law had been given to the Jews on Har Sinai, the Talmud - the Oral Tradition - was waiting at the right hand of the Holy One, blessed be He, ready to be turned over to the Jewish people.”

HUMBLE WILLINGNESS

Rabbi Dovid Hoffman

“He said, ‘Hashem came from Sinai, radiated forth to them from Seir, He appeared from Mount Paran, and He came with part of the sacred myriads...’” (33:2)

Chazal tell us that when Hashem prepared to give the Torah to the Jewish people, several mountains came forth and claimed that the Torah should be given on them. One of these was Har Tavor and another was Har Carmel. However, both mountains were rejected in favor of Har Sinai, due to its smaller size and stature, and thus its greater humility.

Rav Yechezkel Abramsky zt”l (Chazon Yechezkel) records a remarkable insight. Har Tavor represents Bnei Yisrael’s military might, as it is the site where Barak vanquished Sisra and his vast army (Shoftim 4:15). Har Carmel represents Bnei Yisrael’s ability to guide and convince, as reflected in the successful challenge that Eliyahu Hanavi made on Har Carmel against the prophets of the avodah zarah of Ba’al (Melachim 18).

Each of these mountains argued that through the strength which it represents, the Jewish people would successfully spread the Torah to the entire world.

What these mountains failed to understand was that the Torah was not meant to be imposed on other nations by military might or by persuasion. The Almighty declared: “I am Hashem your G-d, Who took you out of Egypt.” The Torah is intended only for the nation that was taken out of Egypt. Only the nation that uttered those immortal words, “Naaseh v’nishma - We will do, even before we understand,” can be the recipients of the Torah.

This willingness to act before comprehending the reason why is an absolute prerequisite to receiving the Torah.

A person must recognize that his actions will determine his spirit. A person cannot feel accomplished if he does not first accomplish. Through our blind devotion to fulfilling the word of Hashem and performing His Torah and mitzvos, we will truly feel holy, and reach the “summit” of kedushah, both in body and in spirit.

HUMBLE ACCEPTANCE

Reb Tzadok HaKohen

“He said, ‘Hashem came from Sinai, radiated forth to them from Seir, He appeared from Mount Paran, and He came with part of the sacred myriads...” (33:2)

Our Sages tell us that Sinai was chosen because it was not a towering mountain; therefore, it signified humility.

“Hashem came from Sinai” is the heart of the acceptance of the Torah for all decisions. “From Sinai” means that the acceptance of the Torah is based on humility.

RIGHTEOUS REVELATIONS

Rebbe Nachman

“While He loves the nations, all His holy ones are in Your hands. They follow Your footsteps, carrying out Your word...” (33:3)

The hands are synonymous with faith, as in “His hands were faith” (Shemos 17:12). And the ones who reveal that faith are the Seven Shepherds - Avraham, Yitzchak, Yaakov, Yosef, Moshe, Aharon and Dovid - who collectively embody the leaders of each generation.

Thus, “All His holy ones” - the tzaddikim who are the true leaders of each generation - “are in Your hands” - they reveal faith in G-d to the world. (See Likutey Moharan I, 22:3)

Tuku le’raglekha (תבו לרגלך, they follow your footsteps) - these are the Torah scholars, who pound (שמכתתים, she’mekhatetim) their feet going from city to city and country to country in order to study and teach G-d’s word. (Bava Basra 8a)

These tzaddikim engage in conversation with all types of people, from scholars to sinners. Although at times their speech appears to be mundane, it serves as a cloak so that the brilliance and intensity of the Torah will not overwhelm people. In this way, the tzaddikim elevate holy sparks and subdue evil. (See Likutey Moharan II, 91:2)

RETURNING NATIONS

Reb Noson of Breslov

“While He loves the nations, all His holy ones are in Your hands. They follow Your footsteps, carrying out Your word...” (33:3)

“Nations” refers to those who have repented or converted for the sake of G-d - people who were distant and have now come closer to G-d.

They draw this strength to reject their previous lives from “all His holy ones” - these are the tzaddikim, who draw true faith into the world. (Likutey Halakhot VIII, p. 257a)

DESPITE ALL HARDSHIPS

Reb Zusia of Anipoli

“While He loves the nations, all His holy ones are in Your hands. They follow Your footsteps, carrying out Your word. The Torah which Moshe commanded us is the heritage of the congregation of Yaakov...” (33:3-4)

Almighty G-d, You show such love to other people that You have dispersed us to be among them in exile. Yet, “All the holy ones are in Your hands” - Your people have faith in You and do not abandon You. “And they were brought in at Your feet” - they are constantly being persecuted. Nevertheless, “He would bear Your utterances” that are constantly proclaiming “The Torah that Moshe commanded us is a heritage of the congregation of Yaakov.” (V. Cohen)

UNITED INHERITANCE

Reb Noson of Breslov

“The Torah which Moshe commanded us is the heritage of the congregation of Yaakov...” (33:4)

But doesn’t the Mishnah (Perkei Avos 2:12) state: “Make yourself fit to study the Torah, for it is not yours by inheritance”?

The main Torah is that which unites the Jewish people, for this unites them with G-d.

When we can truly be 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. (Likutey Halakhot VIII, p. 139a)

TEAM EFFORT

Rabbi Moshe Schochet

“The Torah which Moshe commanded us is the heritage of the congregation of Yaakov...” (33:4)

The Ksav Sofer offers a beautiful insight to help understand this pasuk.

He explains that the Torah cannot be observed in its entirety by one individual person. There are certain mitzvos that only a man can do and certain mitzvos only a woman can do. Some mitzvos can only be performed by a kohen, while others can only be fulfilled by someone from Shevet Yehudah.

The possibility for the Torah to be observed as a whole is contingent on a unified Klal Yisrael.

Therefore, the Ksav Sofer explains the pasuk in the following way: “Torah tzivah lanu Moshe” - the Torah that Moshe commanded us, which is “morasha” - our inheritance, is dependent on “kehillas Yaakov” - the congregation of the Jewish people coming together as one group to observe the Torah in harmony.

INHERITED CONNECTION

Lubavitcher Rebbe

“The Torah which Moshe commanded us is the heritage of the congregation of Yaakov...” (33:4)

Inheritance does not depend upon the suitability of the inheritor; even a newborn can inherit his father’s estate. Thus, this verse teaches us that our connection to the Torah is not forged only once we have matured sufficiently to study it and understand it, but as soon as we are born.

In fact, our awareness of how we are bound to the Torah in our very essence is the foundation of our approach to studying it. This awareness inspires us both to endeavor to learn as much of it as we can and to inspire and enable others to do the same.

For this reason, this verse is traditionally the first one that we teach our children when they begin to speak (Sukkah 42a; Shulchan Aruch, Yoreh Deah 245:5; Shulchan Aruch HaRav, Hilchot Talmud Torah 1:1).

It is crucial that children internalize this awareness before beginning to study the Torah, both in order that their subsequent study be based on this realization and in order that they not form the erroneous impression that the study of the Torah is merely an intellectual pursuit. (Likutei Sichot, vol. 4, pp. 1165-1167) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisnefsky

UNITED WE STAND

Rabbi Jeremy Finn

“The Torah which Moshe commanded us is the heritage of the congregation of Yaakov...” (33:4)

This is the first pasuk that we teach children to say as soon as they start learning. Why? Out of all of the pesukim in the Torah, what is the message contained in this pasuk that we wish to imprint on our children’s minds and hearts?

The Kesav Sofer suggests that the lesson lies not in the beginning of the pasuk, *“צוה לנו משה”*, i.e., the centrality of Torah in Jewish life, but rather in the end of the pasuk, *“מורשה קהילת יעקב”*, a heritage for the house of Yaakov.” When did Moshe command us regarding Torah, and when is it a heritage? Only if we are united as *“מורשה קהילת יעקב”* - the congregation of Yaakov.”

According to the Kesav Sofer, the underlying message of the pasuk is *“קהילת יעקב”* - the unity of the Jewish People as one congregation. It is for this reason that this is chosen as the first pasuk we teach our children, because the first and most important lesson to teach is that united we stand, while divided we fall.

- *“מורשה קהילת יעקב”* - Moshe instructed us with a Torah that is a heritage.
- *“קהילת יעקב”* - Because we are united as one people, one nation, and one congregation.

Perhaps that is why the pasuk refers to us as *“קהילת יעקב”* rather than *“קהילת ישראל”*.

What is the difference between the names Yaakov and Yisrael?

The name Yisrael is given to the patriarch Yaakov after he wrestles with the angel, who injures him in his thigh. The pasuk (Bereishis 32:28) gives the reason the name change as *“כי שרית עם אלקים ועם אנשים ותוכל”* - For you have wrestled with G-d and people and have prevailed.”

We see the name Yisrael represents the struggle that Yaakov had with an angel. It is therefore used to refer to the Jewish People when they are fulfilling the word of Hashem and are at a spiritual peak (Ramban, Bereishis 46:2).

The name Yaakov, by contrast, is derived from the fact that when Yaakov was born, *“ידו אחזת בעקב עשו”* - his hand was holding onto the heel of his brother Eisav.”

In this instance, there is no mention of Heavenly figures as there was in connection with the name Yisrael. The name Yaakov is used to describe the Jewish People when they are not at the height of their spiritual achievement. The name Yaakov defines a people who have far to go in reaching perfection. They do not mention Hashem, but instead are engaged in a battle with physicality and are associated with the heel.

Therefore, when Moshe Rabbeinu wishes to impart a lesson in Jewish unity, he uses the name that denotes a people far from spiritual perfection, because unity does not mean that we all must be equally serving Hashem in the best way possible. Unity needs to be found when we are in a state of Yaakov, when many of our number are far from spiritual perfection or religious observance. It is at that point that we need to be unified and love Jews for the sole reason that we are all part of one family. We need to be able to say to each other that *“while I may disagree vehemently with the way that you live your life, I love you because we are all part of one people.”*

“צוה לנו משה מורשה קהילת יעקב” - Torah is an inheritance when we all live together as one kehilah, even if we haven’t yet reached the level of Yisrael and are merely *“קהילת יעקב”*.

Perhaps that is why this pasuk is the first that we teach our children and is found in the last parashah of the year. Everything begins and ends with Jewish unity.

GREATNESS OF THE GIVER

Rabbi Dovid Hoffman

“The Torah which Moshe commanded us is the heritage of the congregation of Yaakov...” (33:4)

We celebrate the conclusion of the Torah with great joy and dancing. This final parshah of the Torah is read on the holiday of Simchas Torah. But why is this holiday not on Shavuot, the day when the Torah was actually given on Har Sinai?

Is it not redundant to celebrate both Simchas Torah and Shavuos? Why must we have two separate holidays commemorating the Torah?

There are two types of gifts in the world, explains Rav Simchah Zissel Broide zt'l (Rosh Yeshivah of Chevron). There are gifts that have value because of their intrinsic worth (diamond, car, painting), and there are gifts that are valuable by virtue of who gives them to you.

The Torah is the most valuable gift in the world, as well as something that was given by the Greatest Being in the universe. Thus, in order to celebrate it, we need two separate days: One to contemplate the gift and one to contemplate the Giver.

Shavuos is the Yom Tov of the Torah. It is the holiday when we come to the realization that our lives would be entirely different without the Torah. Imagine a week without a Shabbos. Imagine a year without our spiritually uplifting holidays! What would our children look like if we did not have the Torah?

But on that same day, we cannot try to fully understand who the Giver is. That requires an additional day, the day of Simchas Torah.

On Sukkos, we offer sacrifices on behalf of the seventy nations of the world. It is a universal Yom Tov. Shemini Atzeres / Simchas Torah is a time when Hashem says, "Everyone has left. The party is over. I just want you to stay with Me one extra day." There are no special mitzvos, no lulav, esrog or sukkah. No seventy nations. Just the Almighty and His nation getting together for a time of intimate connection.

This is the day when we concentrate on the Master of the Universe. This is the day dedicated to the Giver of the gift of Torah. Shavuos allows us to celebrate the "cheftzah" of Torah (the item itself) and Shemini Atzeres / Simchas Torah allows us to contemplate the greatness of the Giver.

COVENANT OF TORAH

Rabbi Dovid Hoffman

"The Torah which Moshe commanded us is the heritage of the congregation of Yaakov..." (33:4)

Rashi explains that the Torah is our heritage, our connection that binds us to the Almighty, one that we must always hold on to and never abandon.

R' Chaim Pinchas Scheinberg zt'l was once honored with being sandek at the bris of the son of a talmid. Immediately after the bris, he hurriedly made his way to the door where his ride awaited him. The baal simcha quickly ran over and said, "Rebbi, won't you stay for the seudah?"

"I can't," replied R' Chaim. "I have another bris."

The talmid looked at his rebbi in surprise; he was almost positive that no other bris was scheduled for that day.

R' Chaim smiled and explained:

"The Navi (Yirmiyahu 33:25) tells us: 'If not for keeping my covenant (the Torah) day and night, the rules of Heaven and Earth would not apply.' Learning Torah is the bris (covenant) that sustains the world."

R' Chaim concluded, "I must hurry - I have a bris!"

WISE MEN OF FAITH

Rebbe Nachman

"Hashem became King over Yeshurun when the heads of the people were gathered, all the tribes of Israel in unity..." (33:5)

Malkhut (Kingship), the lowest of the sefirot, is directly rooted in Chokhmah (Wisdom), the highest of the sefirot. (Zohar III, 288a)

Leadership must be founded upon wisdom. For this reason, every king has wise men and advisers who help establish his kingdom. And because of a love for the wise men, the kingdom is secured.

In G-d's kingdom, these "wise men" are the tzaddikim. They "gather together" the Jews so they can instill us with faith. (See Likutey Moharan I, 18:4)

EVERLASTING AND ETERNAL

Beis HaLevi

"Hashem became King over Yeshurun when the heads of the people were gathered, all the tribes of Israel in unity..." (33:5)

There are three forms of government: absolute monarchy, in which a king reigns supreme with unlimited authority, a parliamentary state ruled by a legislative body composed of the princes and "heads" of the people, and a republic where the government is in the hands of the broad masses.

It is self-evident that the laws of a nation are fit to its system of government. The laws of an absolute monarchy will differ from those of a parliamentary state, and the laws of a republic will resemble neither of the others.

The Jewish people, by contrast, have the Torah's law as its eternal heritage, no matter what system of government a future Jewish State may adopt.

No matter who reigns over that state - be he a "king in Yeshurun" in an absolute monarchy, or the "heads of the people" in a parliamentary democracy, or "all the tribes of Israel in unity" in a republic - "Moshe commanded us a Torah, an inheritance of the congregation of Yaakov." The Torah will remain the law of the Jewish people forever.

UNIQUE UNITY

Lubavitcher Rebbe

“Hashem became King over Yeshurun when the heads of the people were gathered, all the tribes of Israel in unity...” (33:5)

Unity does not require that all members of a group be alike, but that each one fulfill his or her unique purpose while acknowledging the necessary contribution of all other members of the group.

Furthermore, each member can function fully only when all the other members are functioning fully. Thus, the proper functioning of each member not only affects his or her own effectiveness and the overall effectiveness of the body as a whole, but also the effectiveness of every other member individually.

Thus, Jewish unity should ideally be more than the simple dedication to a common goal (although that is a worthy aim in its own right), and more than a relationship by which each of us completes the other (although this, too, is a worthy aim).

Unity should be an awareness that all of us, together, form one whole. All aspects of all of us are part of one “body,” meaning that every facet of our individual lives has an impact on every facet of the life of every other Jew.

Conversely, just as the body’s completeness is dependent upon the individual completeness of each of its parts, so is it crucial that we all develop our individuality, living up to our unique potential. (Likutei Sichot, vol. 4, pp. 1141-1143) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisniewsky

IT STARTS AT THE TOP

Toldos Yaakov Yosef

“[Moshe said to G-d, ‘You are the King of the Jewish people] when the tribes of Israel are united...” (33:5)

First there must be unity among “the heads of the people,” the leaders, and then the people will be united.

HEARTFELT REPENTANCE

Gerrer Rebbe

“And this to Yehudah...” (33:7)

Who caused Reuven to confess? Yehudah. (Rashi)

Reuven confessed by wearing “his sackcloth and with fasting” (Bereishis 37:29) and Yehudah confessed by admitting his wrong deed (38:26).

The Torah is telling us that one should not repent just by fasting. What is needed is a confession with the sincere feeling of a broken heart. As our Sages noted (Taanis 16a): “Neither sackcloth nor fasting are effective, but only penitence and good deeds.”

WHEN TO ACT

Rabbi Shlomo Ressler

“You [Levi] tested him [Aharon] at the waters of Merivah...” (33:8)

Addressing the tribe of Levi and referring specifically to Aharon, his brother, Moshe says, “You [Levi] tested him [Aharon] at the waters of Merivah” (33:8). This refers to when Moshe hit the rock at Merivah instead of speaking to it, for which Aharon was also punished with death rather than entry into the promised land. As Rabbi Shimon Schwab asks, why is Aharon mentioned here when he was not mentioned in the story of Merivah? Further, why was Aharon punished for Moshe hitting the rock when he seemingly had nothing to do with it?

Rav Schwab answers his question by explaining that although it was Moshe that hit the rock, he used Aharon’s staff, which means that Aharon had the opportunity to talk Moshe out of hitting the rock. Aharon’s passivity is what prompted his inclusion in the punishment. Perhaps this equalization is meant to highlight the importance of appropriate actions as well as inappropriate silence.

SATISFIED AND CONTENT

Rebbe Nachman

“They will teach Your laws to Yaakov and Your Torah to Israel. They will bring incense to appease Your anger and place burnt-offerings upon Your Alter...” (33:10)

It is impossible to draw complete Divine Providence unless one breaks the desire for money, which is a form of idolatry.

In this verse, the word be’apekha (באפרך, Your anger) indicates the hard work that a person engages in to earn a living, as it is written, “By the sweat of your brow (אפריך, Apekha) you will eat” (Bereishis 3:19).

Apekha also reflects the idea that as long as there is money-worship in the world, there is “charon apah” (חרון אף, Divine anger) in the world (cf. Sifri 13:18).

Ke’torah (קטרה, incense) is similar to Katar (קטר, Aramaic for “bind”), indicating that the incense-offering has the power to constrain Divine anger and bring joy in its place, as in “incense makes the heart rejoice” (Mishlei 27:9). When one is happy with his lot, accepting that his livelihood is apportioned to him by Divine Providence, then he no longer needs to struggle to earn a living. (See Likutei Moharan I, 13:1)

PROMOTING PERPETUALITY

Lubavitcher Rebbe

“They will teach Your laws to Yaakov and Your Torah to Israel...” (33:10)

Moshe's blessing to the tribe of Levi is meant to inspire all of us to dedicate ourselves to the holy task of promoting Jewish education, to ensuring that every Jew be given the broadest and deepest knowledge of G-d's Torah as possible.

By pronouncing the tribe of Binyamin's blessing immediately after the tribe of Levi's blessing, Moshe teaches us that just as Binyamin was blessed with the perpetual presence of the holy Temple, so too, our dedication to Jewish education must be ongoing and perpetual, and that the Jewish education we promote must be of the type that ensures the perpetual dedication of the Jewish people to G-d's Torah and commandments. (Hiva'aduyot 5746, vol. 1, pp. 188-189) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisnefsky

HASHEM'S BEST FRIEND

Lubavitcher Rebbe

"He said of Binyamin, 'G-d's beloved one will dwell securely beside Him; He hovers above him all day long; He dwells between his shoulders...'" (33:12)

It was the Levites' task to inspire the people and educate them in the ways of G-d - both through instruction and by serving as examples of G-dly living. In this, we can all learn from the Levites, since we are all capable of influencing those around us to be better people, both by teaching the Torah to those less knowledgeable and by serving as inspiring examples of people who are dedicated to spiritual growth.

Moshe blessed the tribe of Binyamin - referring to Binyamin as "G-d's beloved one" - immediately after blessing the tribe of Levi. This teaches us that when we dedicate ourselves to our Divine mission like the Levites, both regarding our own spiritual growth and regarding our task to inspire and educate others, G-d will consider us His "beloved one," His personal, very best friend. (Hitva'aduyot 5745, vol. 1, p. 98) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisnefsky

EMULATING YOSEF

Lubavitcher Rebbe

"[Moshe] said of [the tribe of] Yosef, 'May his land be blessed by G-d with the delicacies of heaven with the dew, and with the deep that lies below...'" (33:13)

Moshe's blessing to the tribes of Yosef encompassed both the highest, most spiritual matters ("the delicacies of heaven") and the lowest, most mundane matters ("the deep that lies below"). This was an appropriate reward for Yosef's own conduct. As the viceroy of Pharaoh, it was his job to provide both for all of Egypt, from its most refined, righteous inhabitants (i.e., his own family when they arrived in Egypt) to its most depraved, idolatrous inhabitants (i.e., the priests who ministered to its idols; see Bereishis 47:22-26).

We might wonder how Yosef could allow himself to provide for such hardened sinners, essentially aiding and abetting their continued depravity. The answer is that he learned from G-d's example: When Adam and Eve sinned, G-d did not punish them immediately, but gave them time to repent and encouraged them to do so. Yosef acted the same way toward the Egyptians.

The lesson for us here is never to begrudge our fellows the assistance that we can offer them, regardless of how undeserving of it they may seem to us. Rather, like G-d and like Yosef, we must help them to the best of our ability, always hoping that they respond positively to our patience and encouragement. (Hitva'aduyot 5725, vol. 1, pp. 138-145) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisnefsky

OVERCOMING ADVERSITY

Rabbi Shlomo Ressler

"[Moshe] said of [the tribe of] Yosef, 'May his land be blessed by G-d with the delicacies of heaven... and for the precious things of the earth and the bounty thereof and by the goodwill of He Who dwelt in the bush, may this blessing rest upon Yosef's head and upon the crown of he who is prince among his brethren...'" (33:13-16)

As part of the blessings that Moshe bestows upon the children of Israel just before his death, the tribe of Yosef is blessed with a bountiful portion that poetically mentions ample rain, dew, and produce (33:13-17) and then continues with a reference to G-d as "the One Who dwells in the thorn bush" (33:16). Why is G-d conspicuously referred to this way?

The Ramban explains that Moshe's first encounter with G-d was from within the burning bush, long before G-d had an enduring place to dwell among His people. Yosef not only survived in a thorny and hostile environment (Egypt) but, moreover, became viceroy to provide for his family. He also set aside a city just for the Leviim to live, to ensure that the Jewish way of life was preserved during slavery.

His ability to survive in adverse conditions ultimately enabled G-d to dwell among His people permanently. Yosef demonstrated a willingness to do what needed to be done for the greater good, and his actions proved to be a blessing that benefited us all.

SPIRITUAL DELIGHT

Lubavitcher Rebbe

"[Moshe] said of [the tribe of] Yosef, 'May his land be blessed by G-d with the delicacies of heaven... with the delicacies produced by the sun, with the delicacies ripened by the moon... with the perennial delicacies of hills, with the delicacies of the land...'" (33:13-16)

Moshe blessed the tribe of Yosef not only with their material necessities, but with "delicacies," implying that they will enjoy material abundance.

The word “delicacies” is mentioned five times in these verses, corresponding to the five Books of Moshe. The Torah is our spiritual food - the nourishment of our souls - so Moshe’s blessing to the tribe of Yosef was that the study of the Torah should not only nourish the soul but fill it with delight and pleasure.

This teaches us that during the time that we set aside for studying the Torah, we should forget about all our worldly concerns, in order to be able to immerse ourselves in the Torah completely, thereby enjoying our study of it to the fullest. By so doing, we elicit G-d’s blessings for material abundance. (Hitva’aduyot 5743, vol. 1, pp. 196-198) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisniefsky

UNRESTRICTED BLESSINGS

Chasam Sofer

“[Moshe] said of [the tribe of] Yosef, ‘May his land be blessed by G-d with the delicacies of heaven... and for the precious things of the earth and the bounty thereof and by the goodwill of He Who dwelt in the bush, may this blessing rest upon Yosef’s head and upon the crown of he who is prince among his brethren...’” (33:13-16)

As a rule, the Torah can be acquired only through moderation in pleasure (Pirkei Avos 6:6). Accordingly, G-d first revealed Himself to Moshe in a bush - a simple, thorny plant in the wilderness, in order to teach us that over-indulgence in food and drink [or any other physical pleasure] keeps us from truly serving G-d.

Yosef’s tribe, however, was to be an exception to this rule. Moshe promised to the tribe of Yosef that even though its land would be “blessed of G-d, with the precious things of the earth and the bounty thereof,” Yosef would still be able to fulfill the “will of He Who dwelt in the bush,” to do G-d’s will Who revealed Himself in a thorny bush in the arid and desolate wilderness.

Why was Yosef’s tribe favored with this blessing? Because Yosef had to suffer at his brethren’s hands. He had been “separated from his brethren” (alternative translation for “prince among his brethren”). This was why he was deemed worthy of being able to serve G-d even in the midst of wealth and plenty, without imposing restrictions or hardships upon himself.

GOING HEAD-ON

Lubavitcher Rebbe

“These are the myriads of Ephraim and the thousands of Menashe...” (33:17)

Ephraim’s name refers to how Yosef prospered in Egypt despite all odds, while Menashe’s name refers to how Yosef’s prosperity enabled him to forget his pain over the loss of the past that he enjoyed with his parents and siblings (Bereishis 41:51-52).

In terms of our approach to our Divine mission, Menashe symbolizes our awareness of our origins - our natural limitations as human beings - and our awareness that, on account of our limitations, we have to negotiate life’s challenges delicately in order to succeed in our mission.

In contrast, Ephraim symbolizes our awareness of how G-d has blessed us with powers beyond those with which we are endowed naturally, how He has granted us supernatural success in the past and will continue to do so. This awareness enables us to face life’s challenges head-on, ignoring apparent obstacles.

Thus, the reward we can expect for facing life like a “Menashe” is “thousands” - an abundance, to be sure, for it is no small thing to accomplish our purpose despite the odds. Yet if we face life like an “Ephraim,” the reward is “myriads” - tenfold and more, since this approach enables us to accomplish so much more. Our confidence in G-d’s supernatural assistance elicits His infinite bounty, which we draw both into the world and into our own lives. (Sichot Kodesh 5741, vol. 1, pp. 118-121) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisniefsky

FAITH IN THE TZADDIKIM

Reb Noson of Breslov

“Rejoice, Zevulun, in your departure [for business pursuits], and Yissachar, in your tents [of Torah study]...” (33:18)

The Tribe of Zevulun would engage in trade in order to support the Tribe of Yissachar, allowing Yissachar to engage in the study of Torah. (Rashi)

Zevulun’s willingness to support Torah scholars reflects his faith in the tzaddikim, which is the essence of faith. A person who has faith in the tzaddikim merits to remove the barriers and constrictions (i.e., judgments) that prevent others from serving G-d. When these barriers are removed, all nations will recognize G-d. Then the Temple will be rebuilt, all mankind will ascend to serve G-d, and unlimited bounty will flow to the Jews.

MONEY WARS

Rebbe Nachman

“Rejoice, Zevulun, in your departure [for business pursuits], and Yissachar, in your tents [of Torah study]...” (33:18)

Scripture uses the same expression of “going out” when it speaks of waging war, as it is written (Devarim 21:10), “When you go out to war against your enemies.” This teaches us that business activity corresponds to a war. By engaging in business, a person raises the sparks of holiness that have fallen to the Other Side and restores them to the side of holiness. To elevate the fallen sparks, one must wage war against the forces of evil.

The Tribe of Zevulun would engage in trade in order to support the Tribe of Yissachar, allowing Yissachar to engage in the study of Torah. (Rashi)

Because Zevulun loves Yissachar, the tzaddik, he will experience no sadness - i.e., no difficulty - in earning his livelihood. Thus, Zevulun should rejoice.

MORE TORAH, MORE JOY

Beis Avraham

“Rejoice, Zevulun, in your departure [for business pursuits], and Yissachar, in your tents [of Torah study]...” (33:18)

One should rejoice from learning Torah just as Zevulun rejoices when he succeeds in business and earns an abundance of wealth. The more money he earns, the happier he is. So too, the more Torah one learns, the happier one should become.

LEARN AND EARN

Lubavitcher Rebbe

“Rejoice, Zevulun, in your departure [for business pursuits], and Yissachar, in your tents [of Torah study]...” (33:18)

Zevulun is mentioned first in this verse by virtue of the intrinsic merit of working for a living over a life dedicated to full-time Torah study.

As we know, our Divine mission consists of making the physical and materialistic world into G-d's home. Although both studying the Torah and sanctifying the material world accomplish this goal, it is mainly achieved by the latter. Therefore, those who work for a living have a far greater opportunity to fulfill life's purpose than do those who study full-time.

There is, of course, an advantage to full-time study, and Jewish law insists that those who are both capable of studying the Torah full-time and who do not have to work for a living devote themselves to full-time study (Shulchan Aruch, Yoreh Dei'ah 245:22). But with respect to refining the world and thereby transforming it into G-d's home, pride of place belongs to work. (Likutei Sichot, vol. 30, pp. 136-137) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisniewsky

DISCOVERING TREASURES

Rabbi Shlomo Ressler

“Peoples will call [themselves] to the mountain. There they will slaughter offerings of righteousness, for they will suckle the bounty of the sea, and the concealed treasures of the sand...” (33:19)

Zevulun's blessing was that they would be successful merchants, nourished by the “abundance of the seas and treasures hidden in the sand” (33:19). Was their blessing just to find treasures that others lost or left behind?

Sifrei (quoted by Rashi) suggests that Zevulun played a much more significant role. By attracting merchants to Israel, Zevulun not only exposed the merchants to monotheism and a generally harmonious way of life, but he also led them to offer sacrifices in tribute. It turns out that it's not that Zevulun finds the treasures; it's the rest of the world discovering that the Torah way of life (filled with harmonious and congruent actions) is, in fact, the treasure.

THE SELFLESS LEADER

Lubavitcher Rebbe

“He saw the first portion for himself, because the plot of the lawgiver is hidden there. He came with his nation's leaders, executing G-d's justice and judgments with Israel...” (33:21)

Most of the Jews whom Moshe had led out of Egypt died in the desert. G-d decreed that these Jews would only enter the Land of Israel - when resurrected in the Messianic future - if Moshe, too, would be buried outside its borders. The merit of Moshe being buried with them would grant them whatever additional atonement they required (Devarim Rabbah 2:9).

Now, Moshe originally begged G-d to let him enter the Land of Israel - even if only to be buried there (see Devarim 3:23-26). Yet, when G-d informed Moshe that He wanted him to remain outside its borders in order to enable his generation to eventually enter the land with him, Moshe changed his mind, accepting G-d's decision willingly.

He even praised the tribe of Gad for choosing as their territory the area outside the Land of Israel where Moshe's burial site - the tangible evidence of his change of heart - would eventually be located.

We can learn from Moshe's selfless example, changing our notion of what is desirable once we realize that although what we thought we wanted might have benefited us, something else will benefit others. (Hitva'aduyot 5745, vol. 3, pp. 1947-1948) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisniewsky

THE MOSHE WITHIN

Rebbe Nachman

“He saw the first portion for himself, because the plot of the lawgiver is hidden there. He came with his nation's leaders, executing G-d's justice and judgments with Israel...” (33:21)

“The lawgiver” - this refers to Moshe. (Rashi)

Mechokek (מחוקק, lawgiver) has a numerical value of 248, corresponding to the number of positive commandments in the Torah and the number of limbs in the human body. Moshe is called the mechokek because he is embodied in every single Jew, in each and every limb, always urging each limb to fulfill the mitzvah particular to it.

FOREVER YOUNG

Chiddushei HaRim

“Iron and copper shall be your borders, and as your days, so shall your strength be...” (33:25)

Your old age shall be just like your best days; namely, the days of your youth. (Rashi)

If one locks the strength of one’s youth behind iron and copper in order not to squander it on useless things, that strength will be preserved into one’s old age: “As your days, so shall your strength be.”

BLESSINGS FOR ALL

Rabbi Shlomo Ressler

“He who rides the heavens is at your assistance, and with His majesty, the skies...” (33:26)

Dan is blessed with the strength of a lion cub, Naftali’s portion in the land will bring satisfaction to all its inhabitants, and Asher is blessed with sons and abundant oil (33:22-25). Then a blessing with seemingly no recipient is given: “He who rides the heavens is at your assistance, and with His majesty [He rides] the skies” (33:26). Who is the last blessing directed at, and why is it not clear?

Sforno points out that G-d promises consistent blessings for all, regardless of how our specific blessings are manifested. The assistance will be as varied as blessings themselves; the only requirement is that we invite His help. Just as parents support their children in any way their specific child needs or wants it, so too does G-d promise to support us in whatever unique way we need.

PRIDE IN OUR PROTECTION

Reb Levi Yitzchak of Berditchev

“Fortunate are you, Yisrael! Who is like you?! A people delivered by Hashem, your protecting Shield, your Sword of excellency!” (33:29)

The explanation of this verse is as follows: It is prohibited to be conceited. However, it is permissible for a person not to fear anything, to be proud that he has a protector, i.e., his Father in Heaven.

Perhaps this is what our Sages alluded to in saying (Sotah 5a), “An eighth of an eighth of pride is permitted.” This is how one destroys the kelipos (husks or shells; i.e., blockages).

Our pride, based on our trust in G-d, renders us unafraid of contesting evil.

This, then, is the mystical meaning of the verse “Fortunate are you, Yisrael! Who is like you... your majestic sword!” [The word for “your excellency” [גאותך] also means “your conceit” or “pride.” In this context, the words for “your sword of excellency” can be read “the sword is your pride.”]

Meaning, the pride engendered by knowing that G-d is your shield and ally and serves as your sword. Through it, you will slay the kelipos.

Furthermore, “you will tread upon their high places”: The word for “high places” [במותימון] also means “their elevated [sacrificial] platforms.” Thus, we can read this phrase: “Because of your pride in your Divine Protector, you will tread upon the kelipos, which are called “elevated platforms” (Pardes Rimonim 23:2) on account of their haughtiness. Through your pride in the protection of G-d, you will slay them, for they take pride in themselves, not in G-d.

SOURCE OF OUR STRENGTH

Reb Avraham Chaim of Zlotchov

“Fortunate are you, Yisrael! Who is like you?! A people delivered by Hashem, your protecting Shield, the Sword of your excellency! Your enemies shall dwindle away before you, and you shall tread upon their high places...” (33:29)

Remember always that you are “a people delivered by Hashem, your protecting Shield” and never boast of your own strength. If you ever become arrogant and believe that it was your strength that defeated your enemies, that grandeur with which you have been blessed will be changed into a weapon turned against you.

“Who is the sword of your excellency” - your arrogance will turn into a sword that will cause G-d to turn away from you and deliver you to your enemies. For G-d has said of the arrogant: “He and I cannot dwell in the same abode.”

RECIPROCAL AWAKENING

Rebbe Nachman

“Fortunate are you, Yisrael! Who is like you?! A people delivered by Hashem, your protecting Shield, the Sword of your excellency! Your enemies shall dwindle away before you, and you shall tread upon their high places...” (33:29)

It is written, “Fortunate are you, Israel! Who is like you?” It is also written (Shemos 15:11), “Who is like You among the powers, O G-d?” (Zohar III, 1282)

This verse in Devarim, in which Moshe praises the Jewish people, parallels the verse in Shemos, in which the Jewish people praise G-d. The praise of the Jewish people is associated with an “arousal from below,” while the praise of G-d is associated with an “arousal from Above.”

When a person realizes how important he is in G-d’s eyes, he can rouse himself from his spiritual slumber and begin to serve G-d.

This activates a reciprocal energy flow from Above, which manifests in a flow of bounty and blessing that G-d provides for mankind and the world. (See Likutey Moharan I, 60:11)

SPARKS OF MOSHE

Lubavitcher Rebbe

"G-d showed [Moshe] all [that would befall] the Land [of Israel]..." (34:1)

The vision of the Jewish people's future that G-d granted Moshe, up to and including the vision of the final, Messianic Redemption, is a fitting conclusion to the Torah. The Torah was given to humanity in order to enable us to make the world into G-d's home. This goal will ultimately be achieved only upon the advent of the final Redemption.

We are taught that a spark of Moshe's soul is present in the leaders of every generation, as well as in each of us as individuals. Thus, Moshe's blessings - which provide us with the means, the impetus, and the vision to fulfill our Divine mission and our destiny, bringing the world to its fullest completion - are channeled through the spiritual leaders of our generation and then through our own selves, as we look to the Torah as our guide to living life to its fullest, to connecting ourselves with G-d, and to transforming our lives and our world into G-d's true home. (Hitva'aduyot 5724, vol. 1, pp. 31-33; Hitva'aduyot 5745, vol. 1, p. 89; Hitva'aduyot 5750, vol. 1, p. 117) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisniefsky

RAISING THE LOW

Rebbe Nachman

"And Moshe, a servant of Hashem, died there..." (34:5)

When Moshe passed away, G-d lamented (Tehillim 94:16), "Who will stand up for Me against evildoers?" (Sotah 13b)

Liy (לי, for Me) is spelled Lamed-Yod. The letter lamed, which can be translated as "study," represents Lower Wisdom, and the yod represents Upper Wisdom. A tzaddik as great as Moshe can bind these two levels together.

Mi yakum (who will stand up) can also be translated as "who will raise up." In other words: "Who will elevate the lower levels to the higher levels and bind them together, so that the people on the lower levels will come to Me?"

The best thing a person can do to draw close to G-d is to find a tzaddik who can accomplish this. (See Likutey Moharan II, 91:2)

NEVER STOPPED SERVING

The Apter Rav

"And Moshe, a servant of Hashem, died there..." (34:5)

Even after Moshe passed away, he remained the "servant of Hashem, who carried out all that Hashem required of him." As Rashi noted (34:4), Moshe was told to "say to Avraham, to Yitzchak, and to Yaakov, 'The oath that the Holy One, Blessed be He, swore to you, He has fulfilled.'"

Moshe was asked to tell our forefathers that the land Hashem had sworn to give to the Israelites was fulfilled. Even after death, Moshe remained the "servant of Hashem."

SELFLESS SERVICE

Rabbi Moshe Kormornick

"And Moshe, a servant of Hashem, died there..." (34:5)

Moshe did not want to die. He prayed over and over again to remain alive and be allowed to enter into Eretz Yisrael. In fact, the Medrash (Devarim Rabbah 11:10) writes that after 515 prayers for the same thing, Hashem told Moshe to stop. The implication is that if Moshe would have prayed one more time, his prayer would have been accepted, and his request to enter into Eretz Yisrael would have been granted. If so, why did Moshe stop?

This verse answers our question. Moshe was a loyal servant of Hashem, and that means putting Hashem's will above anything else. So, when it finally became clear to Moshe that Hashem did not want him to enter Eretz Yisrael under any circumstances, he dutifully stopped asking further and immediately prepared for his death, joyful at the opportunity of fulfilling Hashem's will (Peirush Mahari Karo, Devarim 34:1). In fact, the accolade "servant of Hashem" testifies to Moshe's willingness to completely forgo his own sense of "self" for the sake of Hashem - demonstrating his perfection of character and providing an insight into what makes a true leader.

The Chofetz Chaim was also a leader who sought to only do what Hashem wanted from him. After his death, the Chofetz Chaim's son was asked to disclose some of the miracles that his father performed. He answered, "I'm sure there are many, but what concerned my father far more than getting Hashem to do his will, was how he could do Hashem's will!"

We, too, must strive to become dedicated servants of Hashem; carefully considering what He wants from us and then doing it with joy.

ATTAINING FAVOR

Reb Noson of Breslov

"And Moshe, a servant of Hashem, died there..." (34:5)

The name Moshe Rabbeinu (משה רבינו, Moshe our teacher) has the numerical value of 613, corresponding to the 613 mitzvot of the Torah.

The Zohar (I, 156a) speaks of Moshe's passing at a level of Ra'ava de'Ra'avin (Will of Wills, the highest level of Divine Favor). Moshe's entire being was geared towards serving G-d and bringing Him pleasure and joy, which arouses Divine Favor.

We, too, can attain a level of Divine Favor by performing the mitzvot, which correspond to Moshe. (Likutey Halachot VII, p. 111a)

CONTINUOUS EDUCATION

Mevasser Tzedek

“And Moshe, a servant of Hashem, died there...” (34:5)

The Hebrew syntax of this pasuk differs significantly from the English rendering. The literal translation of the Hebrew pasuk is: “And Moshe died there; Hashem’s servant,” and conveys a meaningful message concerning the personality of Moshe.

If a teacher studies the Torah with disciples and leads many to righteousness, the study and the worship conducted by the disciples are credited to the teacher as if the teacher had performed these acts, and this continues even after the teacher has died.

The Mishnah (Pirkei Avos 5:21) says of Moshe that he “was righteous and led the people to righteousness; hence, the merit of the people is attributed to him.” Therefore, until the end of time, whatever study and worship the Jewish people perform will be credited to Moshe. Thus, Moshe will remain “the servant of Hashem” even after he “died there.”

LEAVING NO DOUBTS

Kehillas Yitzchak

“And Moshe, a servant of Hashem, died there... No one knows his burial place...” (34:5-6)

Why would we have to be told in so many words that no one knows where Moshe was buried? Would the fact that his burial place is not explicitly mentioned be sufficient indication that the place is unknown?

The Torah is explicit on purpose, in order to show that every single word that Moshe wrote in the Torah is true. In any other nation, a man who had performed as many miracles as Moshe had, and who had never changed until the very end (“his eye was not dim nor his natural force abated” - 34:7), would never have allowed it to be admitted that his burial place was unknown. If not he, then at least his people, would have invented some legend to the effect that he was not buried at all but ascended straight into Heaven, and they would have deified him.

Moshe, however, did not resort to such fiction. He wrote out in so many words that he “died there” and that “no one knows his burial place,” so that all the people would know the truth beyond the shadow of a doubt. We see, then, how true every single word of the Torah is, for had Moshe wanted to falsify anything this would have been his most opportune chance to do it.

This was Rabbi Yonasan Eibenschutz’s reply to the question of an important nobleman about the fact that Moshe had written of himself that he had spent forty days and forty nights on Har Sinai without food or drink. How, the nobleman asked, could Moshe have written down as facts alleged events of which no one knew except himself?

Couldn’t anyone have challenged the truth of these tales, insisting that this account had been a figment of Moshe’s imagination?

In reply, Rabbi Eibenschutz cited this pasuk, pointing out that if Moshe had ever wanted to give himself credit for things he actually had never done, this final section of the Chumash would have afforded him the ideal opportunity to do so. But the Torah points out deliberately that, instead, Moshe merely wrote of himself that “no one knows of his burial place.” The intention was to show us that every word of the Torah is true.

RELATING TO ALL

Rebbe Nachman

“And Moshe, a servant of Hashem, died there... No one knows his burial place...” (34:5-6)

Rabbi Berakhya said: The evil [Roman] empire sent emissaries to the military governor of Beit Pe’or, ordering him to show them where Moshe was buried. The governor took them to the general area. When they stood in an elevated location, it seemed to them that they could see the gravesite down below. And when they stood below, it seemed to them that they could see the gravesite up above. They split into two groups, one for each location. Nevertheless, to those standing above, it seemed that it was below, and to those below, it seemed that it was above. (Sotah 13b-14a)

The true tzaddik must be able to reach out to both the “dwellers above” and the “dwellers below.” This means that he must be able to show those people who are on a high spiritual level that they actually know nothing at all about G-d, as in “What have you seen? What have you understood?” (Zohar I, 1b). And he must be able to show those who are sunken in the lowest levels, who believe they are very distant from G-d, that G-d is still with them and that they are close to Him, because “The whole earth is filled with His glory” (Yeshayahu 6:3). (See Likutey Moharan II, 7:16)

REVEALING G-DLINESS

Reb Noson of Breslov

“Moshe was one hundred and twenty years old when he died. His eye had not dimmed, and his strength had not diminished...” (34:7)

There are 120 permutations of G-d’s Holy Name “Elokim,” which represent Divine kingship and the revelation of G-dliness.

Moshe lived for 120 years [corresponding to the number of permutations] because he was able to draw G-dliness through the revelation of Torah. Hillel, Rabban Yochanan ben Zakkai and Rabbi Akiva also lived 120 years, for they, too, brought a revelation of G-dliness during their lifetimes. (Likutey Halakhot IV, p. 340)

LESSON IN HUMILITY

Rabbi Dovid Hoffman

“And Yehoshua Bin Nun was filled with a spirit of wisdom because Moshe had rested his hands on him...” (34:9)

As the mantle of leadership was now passed on to Yehoshua Bin Nun, the pasuk informs us that he was imbued, “with a spirit of wisdom, because Moshe had rested his hands upon him.” The Yalkut Shimoni in Parshas Pinchas (27:20) notes that Hashem commanded Moshe, “To give from your glory upon him’ - From the glory that was placed upon you at Har Sinai.” Which glory is this referring to?

Rav Akiva Sofer zt'l (Daas Sofer) in the name of the Chida, Rabbeinu Yosef Chaim Dovid Azulai zt'l, quotes the Gemara (Bava Basra 75a) which describes how the Elders of that generation cried when they realized that Yehoshua Bin Nun merited to succeed Moshe Rabbeinu as a result of his profound humility. The Midrash furthers this concept by detailing how Yehoshua had no qualms cleaning and organizing the benches in the beis medrash before the people came to learn Torah. Although he was the foremost talmid of Moshe Rabbeinu who no doubt wielded a great deal of clout, he never felt it was beneath his dignity to perform “custodial” duties when necessary. To this, the Elders cried out and said, “Woe to us for this embarrassment! Had we not felt shame in doing these menial duties, we could have become leaders ourselves!”

All it took was a great deal of humility. As a prized student of Moshe Rabbeinu, Yehoshua absorbed this beautiful attribute from his teacher, of whom the Torah testifies, “The man, Moshe, was very humble.” Yehoshua learned from Moshe’s ways and elevated his own humility to a great level. Thus, Hashem instructed Moshe: “Just as you were worthy to accept the Torah on Har Sinai due to your humble ways, now it is time for Yehoshua to take from your glory - your humility - and lead the Jewish People.”

THERE’S ALWAYS HOPE

Rabbi Shlomo Ressler

“Never again has there arisen in Israel a prophet like Moshe, whom Hashem had known face to face... And all the strong hand, and all the great awe, which Moshe performed before the eyes of all Yisrael...” (34:10-12)

The end of the Torah proclaims that there will never be another prophet like Moshe, as manifested by the signs and wonders that he performed before the eyes of all of Israel (34:10-12). Rashi quotes the Sifrei (33:41), who says that the phrase “Before the eyes of all of Israel” references the breaking of the Luchos (tablets), where the same expression was used. Why would the Torah conclude with reference to a bleak and sorry time in the nation’s history?

The Slonimer Rebbe proposes that the smashing of the Luchos was essentially the catalyst that renewed the people’s closeness with G-d. Thus, the Torah’s reference

to this event is not depressing or discouraging but a glistening reminder that there is always hope, no matter how low we may fall. The Torah’s message of eternal yearning and possibilities is its last, a fitting conclusion to its timeless relevance and boundless inspiration.

CHOOSING AM YISRAEL

Rabbi Jeremy Finn

“And all the strong hand, and all the great awe, which Moshe performed before the eyes of all Yisrael...” (34:12)

Rashi ends his commentary on the Torah by explaining that the “מורא גדול - the great awe” that took place “לעיני כל ישראל - before the eyes of all Yisrael” refers to Moshe breaking the Luchos HaBris when he descended the mountain and saw the golden calf.

The Lubavitcher Rebbe asks that even though Rashi says that Hashem congratulated Moshe on his decision and said, “ישר כחך ששברת - well done for smashing the Tablets,” why is this the last thing mentioned in connection with Moshe Rabbeinu? It was hardly his crowning achievement or the moment that best sums up his contribution to Am Yisrael, so why is it the last thing to be mentioned? If anything, it was the greatest tragedy that happened to Moshe. He needed to break Hashem’s tablets. What is the message here?

The Rebbe explained that the message here is that Moshe was confronted with a dilemma. On one hand, he was holding the two tablets of stone, which were the marriage contract between the Jewish People and Hashem. This meant that by building the golden calf, the Jews had been unfaithful and deserved to be destroyed. On the other hand, Moshe had a deep love for the Jewish People and couldn’t bear to think of their destruction. So what did Moshe do when stuck between the Torah and the Jewish People?

He chose the Jewish People. He broke the Tablets, and in doing so tore up the marriage contract, so now the Jewish People had not been unfaithful, as there had never been a marriage (Rabbi Y.Y. Jacobson).

No one understood what the Torah meant more than Moshe Rabbeinu. No one had love or appreciation of Torah greater than Moshe Rabbeinu.

He had received it directly from Hashem. And still, Moshe chose the Jewish People over the Torah.

Moshe taught us that learning Torah and performing mitzvos has to bring us to a love of the Jewish People; otherwise, we have diminished its value. A Torah without the Jewish People doesn’t make sense, and therefore, with all the pain that is involved, he smashed the luchos.

Many years later, Hashem Himself would be faced with the same dilemma. The Jews deserved punishment. They deserved to be destroyed. They no longer deserved to have a Beis HaMikdash. The choice was whether to destroy the Jews or the Temple.

No one understood more than Hashem what the Temple represented. Every sacrifice offered created a “ריח ניחוח” - a pleasant odor to Hashem.” No one more than Hashem knew and understood the symbolism of the various vessels that were used and the different sacrifices that were brought. However, when faced with a choice between the Temple and the Jewish People, Hashem Himself reacts in the same way as Moshe, destroying the Temple and exiling the Jews in order to keep them alive.

A Beis HaMikdash without Jews to serve in it is like a Torah without Jews to learn and without Jews to observe. Therefore, Hashem congratulates Moshe Rabbeinu for understanding and teaching the lesson. Every mitzvah in the Torah, including the Beis HaMikdash, has at its root a love for Am Yisrael, for without the Jewish People, there would be no Torah and no Beis HaMikdash.

RIGHT BEFORE OUR EYES

Rabbi Dovid Hoffman

“And all the strong hand, and all the great awe, which Moshe performed before the eyes of all Yisrael...” (34:12)

These final words of the Torah are an enigma. What is the everlasting message in them? Rav Avigdor Miller zt'l writes: Our records state that the plagues were openly experienced by the entire nation of Egypt and were witnessed by all of Bnei Yisrael. Our records state that we witnessed the splitting of the Red Sea, through which we passed, and the Egyptians were drowned. For forty years, our entire nation witnessed the Clouds of Glory by day and the pillar of fire by night, and every soul ate food which descended from the sky. These facts were not related to them by individuals but were witnessed by millions of people.

The Jewish People were stiff-necked and opposed their leaders on a number of occasions; they accepted only what they saw. They accepted the Torah not because Moshe showed them miracles but because they heard the Voice of the Almighty speaking to them at Har Sinai. Millions of people witnessed the presence of the Almighty with their own eyes and ears, and our writings do not record a single instance when anyone ever challenged these facts.

After receiving the Torah, the Jewish People spent forty years in the wilderness with almost no contact with other nations, so that they consolidated their knowledge of the Torah without infiltration of foreign influence. Unlike man-made religions based on one central prophet, the Torah was not preached by individuals who afterward succeeded in persuading or coercing multitudes. From the first day, the Torah was studied and accepted by the entire nation without exception.

R' Miller concludes by saying, “The fact that such an expression, ‘in view of all of Yisrael,’ is put at the very end of the Torah, is evidence of how important it was for everything that Moshe did to have been witnessed by all the Jewish People.”

TO EACH THEIR OWN

Reb Baruch of Mezhibuz

“And all the strong hand, and all the great awe, which Moshe performed before the eyes of all of Yisrael...” (34:12)

The Torah concludes with these words to indicate that each Jewish person may see into the Torah according to his own ability and understanding.

HEART OF TORAH

Reb Leibele Eiger

“And all the strong hand, and all the great awe, which Moshe performed before the eyes of all of Yisrael...” (34:12)

The Torah concludes with the letter lamed and begins with the letter bet. Together they spell lev, “heart.” Our Sages say (Sanhedrin 106b), “We must conclude that the Holy One, Blessed be He, desires the heart.” The heart is the entire Torah.

HAFTORAH

ALL-INCLUSIVE TORAH

Malbim

“...but you shall meditate on it day and night, so that you may observe to do all that is written in it...” (Yehoshua 1:8)

If you meditate on the Torah day and night and immerse yourself in it, you'll find that everything you must “observe to do” - including the Oral Tradition's laws, the legal safeguards, and the customs and Rabbinical ordinances - are already implicit in the Written Torah.

The entire Oral Tradition can be derived from the thirteen canons by means of which the Torah is interpreted, from homilies, grammatical rules, inferences and Biblical exegesis.

Likewise, all the Torah insights that will ever be stated are directly implicit in the Written Law. But if one is to discover all this, one must study and meditate on the Torah diligently.

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