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Yeshivat Har Etzion office@etzion.org.il to yhe-parsha show details Oct 10 (2 days ago) YESHIVAT HAR ETZION ISRAEL KOSCHITZKY VIRTUAL BEIT MIDRASH (VBM) PARASHAT HASHAVUA <http://vbm-torah.org/archive/parsha71/54-71vezot.htm> In memory of our father, Moshe Eliezer ben Avraham Yosef by Isaac Ely and Naomi Stillman
Dedicated by Linda and Bernie Weiner
PARASHAT VEZOT HA-BERAKHA

VeZot Ha-Torah

By Rav Yair Kahn

I. No Other Prophet Like Moshe The Torah ends with a eulogy for Moshe Rabbeinu. The description of Moshe's nevu'a (prophecy) in that context is noteworthy: Moshe interacted with God directly, "face to face" (Devarim 34:10). This description is reminiscent of the incident recorded in Parashat Beha'alotekha, when Miriam and Aharon spoke against Moshe: "Has Hashem indeed spoken only with Moshe? Has He not spoken with us as well?" (Bamidbar 12:2). In response, Hashem appears to them: And Hashem came down in a pillar of cloud, and stood at the door of the Tent, and called Aaron and Miriam; and they both came forth. And He said: "Hear now My words: If there be a prophet among you, I Hashem do make Myself known unto him in a vision, I do speak with him in a dream. Not so regarding My servant Moshe; he is trusted in all My house; With him do I speak mouth to mouth, even manifestly, and not in riddles; and the similitude of Hashem does he behold. Wherefore then were you not afraid to speak against My servant, against Moshe?" (Bamidbar 12:5-8). Interestingly, in his "thirteen principles of faith," the Rambam lists belief in nevu'a and the belief in the unique nevu'a of Moshe as two independent principles. In his Laws of the Foundations of the Torah (ch. 8), the Rambam explains that our faith in Moshe's nevu'a is not rooted in nature-defying miracles, but rather in ma'amad Har Sinai, when we, as a collective, personally experienced this "face to face" prophecy: "Hashem spoke to your entire community face to face" (Devarim 5:4, see the shiur on Parashat Va'etchanan). Rav Soloveitchik z"l suggested that this is also the main thrust of the commandment never to forget what Hashem did to Miriam. This command is ordinarily viewed as a warning not to speak lashon ha-ra, but Rav Soloveitchik suggested that the Torah is demanding that we be constantly aware of the unique level of Moshe Rabbeinu's nevu'a. After all, it is our

faith in Moshe's nevu'a that is the foundation of our belief in the Torah, which was given to us in its entirety by Moshe (a third principle enumerated by the Rambam). Therefore, the emphasis on the unique "face to face" nevu'a of Moshe is an appropriate ending of the Torah. II. The Last Eight Pesukim Our belief that the entire Torah was given by Moshe runs into difficulty when considering the final eight pesukim, which record Moshe's death. Our sages already raised this question: "So Moshe the servant of Hashem died there. Now is it possible that Moshe being dead could have written the words, 'Moshe died there'?" (Baba Batra 15a). The beraita cites a difference of opinion regarding the solution to this problem: The truth is, however, that up to this point Moshe wrote; from this point, Yehoshua wrote. This is the opinion of R. Yehuda, or, according to others, of R. Nehemiah. [But] R. Shimon said to him: Can the Torah scroll be short of one word? ... No; what we must say is that up to this point, the Holy One, blessed be He, dictated and Moshe spoke and wrote, and from this point God dictated and Moshe wrote with tears, as it says [in Yirmiyahu 36], "Then Baruch answered them: He pronounced all these words unto me with his mouth, and I wrote them with ink in the book." The beraita suggests two solutions – either that Yehoshua wrote the last eight pesukim of the Torah or that Hashem dictated these words to Moshe before his death. No one suggests a third option – that Moshe wrote these pesukim after he died. Although this solution would have solved the problem, the possibility is immediately negated for obvious reasons: "Now is it possible that Moshe being dead could have written the words; 'Moshe died there'?" Nevertheless, we will return to this option later. R. Yehuda chose a path consistent with the straightforward reading of the Torah, but it seems to run counter to a basic religious tenet – that the entire Torah is comprised of the unique nevu'a of Moshe. Presumably, he limits his remarks to the final eight pesukim, but agrees to the integrity of the rest of the Torah as that of Moshe. Some commentators extended this position to include additional peripheral phrases, without undermining the authority of the Torah as a divine document delivered through Moshe. The position of R. Shimon, in contrast, is religiously sound, but exegetically strained. In his view, the entire Torah is the Torah of Moshe, but it is difficult to fathom that Moshe wrote of his own demise. Furthermore, it is not clear why the pasuk from Yirmiyahu had to be enlisted in support of this theory. Consider the continuation of the gemara in Bava Batra: Which of these two authorities is followed in the rule that ... "The last eight verses of the Torah are read by one person alone?" It follows R. Yehuda and not R. Shimon. I may even say, however, that it follows R. Shimon, [who would say that] since they differ [from the rest of the Torah] in one way, they differ in another. The gemara is discussing a halakha that distinguishes the way we publically read the final eight pesukim from the public reading of the rest of the Torah. (The commentators are divided regarding the details of the difference, but that is not relevant at the moment.) The gemara initially proposes that any deviation is consistent with the position of R. Yehuda, who suggests a concrete distinction between the final pesukim and the rest of the Torah. The gemara concludes, however, that even R. Shimon's opinion justifies differentiation; even he agrees that the final pesukim are different than the rest of the Torah, even though they were written by Moshe. However, if Moshe himself wrote the final pesukim during his lifetime, in what way are these pesukim different? To answer our question, let's take a closer look at the context of the pasuk in Yirmiyahu that R. Shimon enlisted to explain the final pesukim. Chapter 26 of Yirmiyahu describes the beginning of the rule of Yohoyakim, when Yirmiyahu was sent to the Mikdash to prophesize the destruction of Yerushalayim. He was attacked by a mob and placed on public trial, during which the kohanim and (false) prophets demanded that Yirmiyahu be put to death. The people and the king's ministers argued in favor of Yirmiyahu, citing, among other things, the tragic case of the prophet Uriyahu, who was executed by Yehoyakim for similar prophesies. Yirmiyahu's life was ultimately spared. Chapter 36 takes place on the fourth year of Yehoyakim's rule. At this point, Yirmiyahu is barred from going to the

Mikdash to publicize his nevu'a. Instead, Hashem commands him to write down the nevu'a in the hope that through this document, his nevu'a will be heard and lead to teshuva. Yirmiyahu calls upon Baruch the son of Neria to write the nevu'a and tells him to go to the Mikdash and read the manuscript to the people on a fast day. Word of the manuscript reaches the king's ministers and they call Baruch to recite the document before them. After listening to the nevu'a, the ministers ask Baruch how the manuscript was written. This is the context of the pasuk quoted by the gemara: "Then Baruch answered them: He [Yirmiyahu] pronounced all these words unto me with his mouth, and I wrote them with ink in the book." In order to appreciate the significance of this pasuk, it is critical to introduce an important point regarding scripture. The Tanakh is comprised of Torah, Nevi'im, and Ketuvim. Torah is unique insofar as it contains the word of Hashem as transmitted to Yisrael through Moshe. However, what is the distinction between Nevi'im and Ketuvim, which are both divinely inspired? Several solutions have been suggested, but I would like to focus on the suggestion of R. Hutner zt"l. He asserted that the word nevu'a, prophecy, comes from the root "niv sefatayim" (Yeshayahu 57:19), referring to speech. Nevu'a was given to the prophet to be told to the people. After they were told, those that contain eternal messages were written and included in scripture in the Nevi'im. Ketuvim, on the other hand, were never intended to be spoken; their original intent was to be written (literally, ketuvim) (see Pachad Yitzchak, Shavuot 2:6). According to this theory, the unique aspect of the sefer written by Baruch the son of Neria was that the nevu'a was transcribed before it was transmitted. Because Yirmiyahu was barred from the Mikdash and was prevented from speaking there, he asked Baruch to write down the nevu'a, according to the laws of scripture (on parchment with ink) and only later read it to the people. Based on the above distinction between Nevi'im and Ketuvim, it makes sense that when the sefer was written, it was considered as Ketuvim. The sefer of Baruch become part of Nevi'im as part of the nevu'a of Yirmiyahu only when the nevu'a was told to the nation. Similarly, Moshe Rabbeinu is the greatest of all prophets; the communication between him and Hashem was direct, "face to face." He transmitted the word of Hashem to Yisrael and only then wrote it down, as R. Shimon taught: "Up to this point, the Holy One, blessed be He, dictated and Moshe spoke and wrote." However, the final eight pesukim were never transmitted orally to Yisrael. According to R. Shimon, Moshe transcribed those verses in lonely silence: "From this point, God dictated and Moshe wrote with tears." Only after his death, when the Torah was opened, did Yisrael discover that another eight pesukim had been written. Based on the parallel to the sefer of Baruch the son of Neria, these verses were likewise no more than Ketuvim when they were originally written. It was only after those pesukim were read to Yisrael that they became included in nevu'as Moshe and incorporated into the rest of the Torah. Thus, according to R. Shimon, the final eight pesukim carry the same religious weight as the rest of the Torah. They are included in the divine word that was transmitted to Moshe face to face, as was witnessed by Yisrael at Sinai. Nevertheless, the inclusion into the Torah occurred posthumously. Thus, Moshe, through the Torah, informed Yisrael of his death only after he had actually died.[1] III. Read by One Person Alone We noted that the gemara in Bava Batra notes an halakhic distinction between the public reading of the final eight pesukim and the public reading of the rest of the Torah: "The last eight verses of the Torah are read by one person alone." There are various interpretations of this halakha. According to Rashi, these pesukim must be read together and should not be divided into separate aliyot. The Meiri brings a similar opinion that these pesukim should constitute a separate aliya and should not be combined with the verses that precede them. Both of these suggestions are building off the idea that the final eight pesukim form an organic unit. The Meiri cites another opinion that a "singular" individual should read these pesukim. This may be the basis for the minhag of awarding "Chatan Torah" to one of the communal sages. Tosafot quote a fascinating suggestion in the name of Rabbeinu Meshulam; that the one who reads these pesukim

should also receive the aliya. In general, we appoint one person to read the entire parasha, while calling up other people for their respective aliyot. However, these eight pesukim should be read by the person receiving the aliya himself. Rabbeinu Tam rejected this position, arguing that our practice of appointing a Torah reader is a later development that did not exist at the time of the Tannaim. In the time of R. Yehuda and R. Shimon, the person who received the aliya always read the Torah as well. Before explaining the position of Rabbeinu Meshulam, let us take a glance at one more halakha: "It is no longer the custom to translate, for what use is a translation that is not understood?" (Shulchan Arukh, Orach Chaim 145:3). The Shulchan Arukh is referring to the practice of reading the Aramaic translation of Onkelos during the public Torah reading. This practice was derived from scripture: "What is that which is written, 'And they read from the book of Hashem's Torah explained...?' 'The book of Hashem's Torah' – this is Scripture. 'Explained' – this is translation. (Nedarim 37b) At first glance, we would assume that the solitary purpose of the translation is so that the people who are more familiar with Aramaic than Hebrew will understand that which is being read. Therefore, nowadays, most communities have abolished the practice of targum, as we understand Hebrew better than Aramaic. But consider the following Yerushalmi: R. Hagai said: R. Shmuel the son of R. Yitzchak entered shul. He saw Huna arising to recite the Targum without appointing a person in his stead. He said to him: It is prohibited. Just as she [the Torah] was given through a middleman, so too we must treat her by going through a middleman. (Yerushalmi Megilla 4:1) The Yerushalmi insists that the Torah reader and translator be two distinct individuals, in order to mirror the Sinai model. From this we learn that there is another idea achieved through the institution of Targum: we must pattern the public Torah reading after the giving of the Torah at Sinai, which was transmitted through Moshe. This model is maintained by the reader, who plays the role of Hashem, as it were, and the reciter of the Targum, who acts as Moshe Rabbeinu, the middleman. This idea is supported by a gemara in Berakhot: R. Shimon the son of Pazi said: From where do we derive that the translator should not raise his voice above that of the reader? For it says [regarding ma'amad Har Sinai]: "Moshe shall speak and God will respond in His voice" ... What do we derive from "in His voice"? In the same voice as Moshe. (Berakhot 45a) Nowadays, when the practice of Targum is no longer prevalent, how do we reenact Sinai? The answer is found in another halakha: "If the Torah reader wants to receive the aliya himself, another person must stand alongside, for just as she was given through a middleman, so too we must treat her by going through a middleman" (Shulchan Arukh, Orach Chaim 141:4). In other words, nowadays, when we appoint a separate person to read the Torah, the translator was replaced by the reader. The one who receives the aliya, who reads silently, represents Hashem, as it were, while the reader, who raises his voice so that all can hear, plays the role of Moshe, the middleman. Therefore, if the Torah reader himself receives the aliya and additional person is required to act as the middleman. Rabbeinu Meshulam argued that there is no need for a middleman with respect to the final eight pesukim. Even R. Shimon agrees that these pesukim are distinct insofar as they were never transmitted orally by Moshe, the middleman. Therefore, there is no necessity for a distinct party to translate the Torah reading in order to complete the Sinai model. In applying this idea to the halakhic reality of his time, when translating to Aramaic was no longer practiced, Rabbeinu Meshulam argued that there should be no division between the reader and the person getting the aliya regarding these pesukim. The Rambam (Hilkhot Tefilla 13:6) offered an additional explanation for the halakha that the final pesukim should be read by one person. According to him, even though a minyan is needed for the public Torah reading, these eight pesukim can be read in shul with less than ten people. The Raavad comments: "We have never heard of such a thing... and what he wrote is something very strange." In truth, Rambam's interpretation is strange. Why should the minyan requirement be abolished regarding the final eight pesukim? Based on the above, we can explain that a minyan for Torah is

required because ten people constitute a minimal representation of Yisrael as a nation. The Torah refers to ma'amad Har Sinai as the day of the assembly (see Devarim 9:10). Therefore, the Torah, which must be read in accord with the Sinai model, demands the presence of at least ten people. (There may be an independent requirement for a minyan during the recital of the blessings that precede the public Torah reading.) Accordingly, the final pesukim, which were not transmitted to the public by Moshe, are not bound by the Sinai model. Therefore, it is reasonable that these pesukim should be exempt from the minyan requirement.

[1] Rav Soloveitchik zt"l offered a similar explanation; see Machanaim 3 (1993) and Community, Covenant and Commitment, pp.323-5 for a slightly different version.

from: Torah Musings <newsletter@torahmusings.com> date: Tue, Oct 14, 2014 at 10:26 AM subject: Torah Musings Daily Digest for 10/14/2014:

**Women Dancing With Torah Scrolls
by R. Gil Student**

I don't like dancing, not on Simchas Torah nor at bar mitvahs nor even at my wedding. It's a chore I've learned to deal with. Looking over the mechitzah on Simchas Torah, I am both troubled and envious.

Many of the women I see look very bored. Why should they sit bored on this holiday? On the other hand, they do not have this communal, family and customary obligation to dance. They can sit in the women's section and open a sefer and learn. I can't do that without being reprimanded. In many synagogues, the women watch the men dance, some with great delight, others bored and others just talking with each other and ignoring the dancing. To level the field and give women more options, decades ago some synagogues began women dances and even introduced Torah scrolls into the women's dances. This was and remains controversial.

The Beit Hillel organization in Israel recently published a responsum permitting women to dance with Torah scrolls on Simchas Torah. They base their view on R. Nachum Rabinovich's ruling in Si'ach Nachum (no. 40), explicitly permitting this practice. Without detracting from R. Rabinovich or the men and women of Beit Hillel, I cite here contrary opinions.

Primary among them is that of R. Joseph B. Soloveitchik. He is quoted by his nephew, R. Moshe Meiselman, as deeming the practice impermissible (he does not say forbidden). While R. Meiselman's assertions in the name of his uncle can sometimes be questioned, and in the next issue of Jewish Action I do just that on one specific point, readers should note that the following quote appeared in a book published in 1978 as part of R. Norman Lamm's Library of Jewish Law and Ethics. I am not suggesting that R. Lamm agrees with everything in this book (he indicates in his Foreword that he does not). I am suggesting that if an explicit quote in this book in R. Soloveitchik's name was incorrect, in all likelihood he would have made it known. I am not aware of any claim that this specific depiction of his view is inaccurate.

R. Moshe Meiselman, Jewish Woman in Jewish Law (New York, 1978), p. 146:

An associated issue, although technically totally different, is the permissibility of women dancing in the synagogue with Torah scrolls during hakafot on Simhat Torah. This practice has been opposed by all contemporary rabbinic authorities. My revered teacher, Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik, told me that he opposed this practice when questioned by synagogues in Brookline, Massachusetts, and New York City. The basis for this ruling, he told me, is that the Talmud in Berakhot which says that just as there is an etiquette that regulates one's behaviour when visiting someone else's home, so too there is a tradition that regulates behaviour in the synagogue. Thus, for example, eating in the synagogue is not permitted. An element of proper synagogue behaviour, such as the prohibition against eating in the synagogue, is explicated in legal detail by the Talmud and by subsequent codes of Jewish law. The same applies to the introduction of

innovations which our ancestors considered to be in conflict with the feeling of respect and awe owed to the synagogue. Proper synagogue behaviour is determined by practice and tradition. Since it has been the age-old practice of synagogues that women do not dance with Torah scrolls during hakafot, the introduction of this practice would be a violation of synagogue etiquette.

R. Menachem Schneerson, the late Lubavitcher Rebbe, wrote a 1975 letter to R. Shlomo Riskin, voicing his opposition to women's dancing with a Torah scroll on Simchas Torah. You can see the letter in Hebrew here: [link](#). He argues that:

We may not create new synagogue customs We may not change existing synagogue customs The Rema only permits menstruating women to attend synagogue and pray with the community--responding "Amen" and "Yehei shemeih rabbah"--because of "great sadness" if they are prevented from attending synagogue. R. Schneerson infers that only attending synagogue is permitted and not other changes. More recently, R. Yaakov Ariel opposes women dancing with a Torah scroll ([link](#)). He points out that celebrating the Torah does not require dancing with a Torah scroll. Some communities have the tradition that even men do not dance with Torah scrolls. Women are right to want to celebrate the Torah but they should do so creatively, finding their own way to do so rather than imitating how (some) men celebrate.

R. Dov Lior ([link](#)) writes that throughout the generations, women have not danced with Torah scrolls. The differences between men and women are real, each with their own religious roles. When women act in ways that men traditionally have, they detract from the respect due their own roles. Therefore, women certainly should not dance with Torah scrolls.

I don't claim that this list is comprehensive. I appreciate if readers post in the response section what other halakhic authorities have said or written on the subject. In the end, it is up to the synagogue rabbi to consult with his posek and decide what is permissible and appropriate.

from: Shema Yisrael Torah Network <shemalist@shemayisrael.com> to: Peninim <peninim@shemayisrael.com> date: Tue, Oct 7, 2014 at 6:31 PM subject: **Peninim on the Torah by Rabbi A. Leib Scheinbaum**

PARSHAS V'ZOS HABRACHA The one who said of his father and mother, "I have not favored him." (33:9) As Moshe Rabbeinu prepares to take leave of his flock, he blesses the members of each tribe. He points out their inherent positive qualities and he underscores those areas of their character which require improvement. To pat a person on the back and not inform him of his shortcomings can be self-defeating. In addressing Shevet Levi, Moshe notes the members' incredible devotion to Hashem, their commitment which was revealed during the chet ha'eigel, sin of the Golden Calf. When everyone else sinned, they refrained from getting involved in the sacrilege. Moshe had then called out, Mi l'Hashem eilai, "Who is for Hashem, should stand by me!" Shevet Levi answered the call and, upon Moshe's order, took their swords and slew members of their own families: a maternal grandfather; a grandson from their daughter; a brother from the same mother. There is no question that they loved their family members; that love, however, was just not as great as the love and allegiance that they maintained for Hashem.

These actions certainly portray the lofty spiritual achievements of the members of Shevet Levi. They were unlike any other tribe in their total devotion to Hashem. This is specifically why it is surprising that Moshe concludes his accolade, "For they (the Leviim) have observed Your word, and Your Covenant they preserved." Is this praiseworthy of such spiritual supermen? After saying that they did not recognize father and mother, is it necessary to add that they were also observant Jews? Observing Hashem's mitzvos, preserving His covenant, is standard fare for every Jew.

In Gevilei Eish, Horav Avraham Zelmens, zl, derives a powerful lesson from here. The spiritual giant who has achieved distinction in his service of Hashem, regardless of his enormous accomplishments, must still be meticulous concerning the "every day," "ordinary" mitzvos which seem to

pale in comparison with what he has so far achieved. One should not say: "I carry an entire Jewish world on my shoulders;" "I have very little time or patience for the young couple who needs my guidance;" "Davening is important, but if it stands in the way of a major meeting to help Klal Yisrael, I will just have to cut my davening down a bit." The list goes on. Everyone has the opportunity for accomplishing great things. This is important - all this is why we are here; but no one should do anything at the expense of his basic relationship with Hashem. It may be compared to those individuals who make sure that their heart and brain are in perfect health, while at the same time disregard a minor infection that, because it had been ignored, becomes septic and almost ends his life.

The Rosh Yeshivah adds that we all know ordinary, good, observant Jews who are meticulous in their day-to-day observance, and succeed in overcoming the challenges that often stand before them. When these upstanding members of our community are asked to accept a more demanding position, however, one of leadership, one which is fraught with challenges, they back down. There are also those who thrive on the major issues, who sustain themselves by fighting for Klal Yisrael, for such collective issues as Shabbos, Kashrus, and Torah, but when it comes to the everyday non-challenging mitzvos, they simply cannot deal with them. Mitzvah performance is an ego enhancer for them. They require the klal work; otherwise, they might get bored with Yiddishkeit. The true osek b'tzarchei tzibbur, one who occupies himself on the spiritual frontlines, working on behalf of Klal Yisrael, does the same for the "little guy": for the abandoned woman whose recalcitrant husband acts with a total lack of impunity; to the boy and girl who are at risk, but do not have the luxury of coming from a pedigreed family; for the many families who just need someone to talk to, someone to hold their hand and guide them. The list goes on. It is a no-brainer to be a klal tuer because that is how one receives accolades. One who has an ego deficiency will invariably trend toward those mitzvos and good deeds which call attention to himself. Shevet Levi personified true greatness. The members of this tribe accepted the challenges, the challenges of rising up against a nation gone mad, engrossed in sinful orgy. They stood up to close family. They protected the moral purity and pristine spiritual essence of our nation. This was, however, not executed at the expense of lesser mitzvos, which preserve the covenant between our people and Hashem. Theirs was a total commitment, to all people, under all circumstances.

Of Naftali he said, "Naftali, satiated with favor, and filled with Hashem's blessing." (33:23)

Interestingly, prior to emphasizing that Naftali is filled with Hashem's blessing, the Torah notes that he is a seva ratzon, satiated with favor, or, as we would probably translate it in Yiddish, A tzufridener mench, a happy person. Why does svias ratzon precede blessing? One who is not a "favorable" person does not appreciate the blessing in his life. Conversely, one who is satiated with favor does not require an abundance of blessing. To him, everything is a blessing from Hashem.

We say in benching and in Sefer Tehillim 145:16, Poseach es Yadecha, u'masbia l'chol chai ratzon, "You open Your hand, and satisfy the desire of every living thing." Horav Zalmen Sorotzkin, zl, observes that the blessing, "You open Your hand," is accompanied with the blessing, svias ratzon. We realize that, unless one is a satisfied, happy person, no blessing will suffice. He will always seek more. Only one who has achieved a sense of satisfaction in life will feel blessed with every gift he receives.

Horav Shlomo Levinstein, zl, offers an anecdotal story which supports this idea. A powerful king became ill with depression. His advisors sought out the most accomplished physicians who specialized in the treatment of depression, to no avail. Every treatment failed. Even those that worked for a short while did just that - worked for a short while. The king ultimately returned to his depressed state. Finally, they met with a top specialist who guaranteed a cure. The king would have to obtain and wear the shirt of a man

who was me'ushar, truly fortunate. By wearing the garment, the feeling that this person had would rub off on the king.

The advisors immediately sent out agents throughout the entire land in search of such a person. Certainly, there had to be one person who felt himself to be fortunate. They had no luck in locating such a person. With whomever they met, after a few moments of conversation, they realized that this person was not happy with his life! They met with diplomats, distinguished legislators, powerful leaders, and discovered that not a single one of them was truly happy. Each one had his personal issues and demons that secretly made him miserable. They next met with the wealthiest people in the country. How surprised they were that even these people were obsessed with losing their wealth and were constantly worrying about what the next day would bring, how the market would react to world news, etc. They tried the poor, who were regrettably plagued with envy, who viewed anyone who had more than they did as their mortal enemy. This was too much. Was there no happy person in the entire land?

Finally, word reached them that a man who lived in a small hut by the beach claimed to be very fortunate. He possessed a wonderful disposition and needed nothing. Indeed, he felt that he had it all. This was too good to be true. They would finally be able to cure their beloved king of his illness. They traveled out to the man's "abode" and asked him if he would be so kind as to lend his cloak to the king. They explained that this would cure the king.

The man listened to their request and laughed, "That is specifically the secret of my success. I do not have a shirt! You see, if I would own a shirt, I would need a jacket and a tie. After I had a suit of clothes, I would yearn for a place to go, to show it off. Then I would require a house. Once I had a house, it would not be large enough. After that, would come the decorating, etc. Do you not see that by not having anything - I require nothing? Now I can be happy!"

People are sadly trapped in a lifelong contest whereby they all strive to get more of everything: money, prestige, success, etc. While this attitude has a powerful upside to it: it motivates people to work harder, push higher, strive more - it can be taken too far and become an obsession. We benefit from overachievers, but are they happy people? A steady diet of unquenchable desires, overbearing competitiveness and constant dissatisfaction to the point that one is never happy with success can damage one's mental health. Psychiatrists have pointed out that such people are often a menace to society, because they treat those beneath them with disdain, as inferiors, and those who are above them as objects of envy and jealousy.

One who is sameach b'chelko, happy with his lot, who has svius ratzon, satisfaction, is a person who says, "I have enough." A popular secular writer was once asked concerning a certain billionaire: "How does it feel to know that he (the billionaire) made more money in one day than you (the writer) made in your entire life?" The writer replied, "I have something that he can never have!" What on earth can that be?" the man asked. "I have the knowledge that I have enough."

And Moshe, servant of Hashem, died there, in the land of Moav, by the mouth of Hashem. (34:5)

The underlying profundity of this pasuk is compelling. The greatest accolade that Moshe Rabbeinu earned for himself is eved Hashem, servant of Hashem. As a servant's will is supplanted by the will of his master to the point that a servant does not have his own will, so, too, was it with Moshe. Actually, this should be the paradigm for all Jews to emulate - lived for the ratzon Hashem, the will of G-d. Hashem's will, which was Moshe's will, should also be ours.

Concerning Moshe's passing from this world "by the mouth of Hashem," the Talmud Moed Katan 28a explains that this means that Moshe died by misas neshikah, death by a kiss from G-d, which means directly through Hashem, without the intercession of the Malach Hamaves, Angel of Death. Alternatively, it means that the soul becomes united with the holiness of the Shechinah, Divine Presence. In the Talmud Brachos 8a, Chazal liken this

most desirable form of death as painless, like pulling a hair from milk, that is, the soul leaves the mortal body without resistance.

In Resisei Laylah, Horav Tzadok HaKohen, zl, explains this phenomenon in a practical manner. When a person pursues worldly, physical pleasures, he establishes a bond between himself/his soul and the pleasures of this material/physical world. Thus, a soul that is closely bonded with physical pleasure will find it very difficult to extricate itself from this physical life. Indeed, Chazal describe death for those who have totally attached themselves to physicality as pulling embedded thistles from a sheep's wool. For those tzaddikim, righteous Jews, like Moshe Rabbeinu, Aharon HaKohen and Miriam HaNeviah, whose flawless souls maintained their purity throughout their mortal journey, no effort, no regret and no pain are associated with leaving. After all, their soul is finally being reunited with its Source.

Do we really know who is a tzaddik? Clearly, there are those who have lived a pristine life devoted to Torah, mitzvos and the performance of good deeds. There are others who actively conceal so much of their good; and yet others who are too busy with themselves to notice the selflessness of others. Be that as it may, there are many very good people in the world. Ultimately, the definition of good is left for Heaven to determine. Hashem has the last word. This idea is alluded to by what appears to be an ambiguous passage in the Talmud Moed Katan 25b.

"Rav Ashi said to the sapdan, eulogist, 'On that day (when I will die) what will you say (about me)?' Bar Kippok (who was the eulogist) replied, 'I will say the following: If upon cedar trees a flame has fallen, what shall the hyssops of the wall do? If a Leviathan was lifted from the sea with (nothing more than) a fish hook, what shall the small fish do? If into a rushing stream dryness descended, what shall the stagnant pond waters do?'" Basically, the sapdan was intimating that, if the Angel of Death had power over the high and mighty, if he was able to overcome the flow of righteous deeds coming forth from the tzaddik, what should the common folk say?

Let us now put this passage into perspective. Rav Ashi, together with Ravina, were the redactors of the Talmud. They are the final word concerning Talmudic law. What concern could an individual of such exemplary achievement have regarding what the eulogist would say?

Horav Mordechai Eliyahu, zl, quotes the Talmud Brachos 62a, where Chazal say that people who eulogize the deceased are taught to take great care concerning the plaudits they deliver about the deceased. If they are somewhat complimentary, it is permissible. If, however, they get carried away and overstep their bounds with accolades (that are not realistic or true), they will have to answer to Heaven, and so will the soul of the deceased. It makes sense that they should not exaggerate, and if they do, they should have to answer for it, but why should the soul of the deceased suffer as a result of the eulogist's overactive imagination?

The Rishon LeTzion explains that the words expressed during a eulogy invariably serve as the barometer of the abilities and achievements of the deceased. If mortals say that an individual was incredibly brilliant or consummately diligent in his Torah studies, the question in Heaven will be: If this is "true," how is it that you did not accomplish more and greater things than you did? The esteem in which others hold us can sometimes work to our detriment, if their comments suggest that we were destined for greatness. This is what Rav Ashi, the great Amora, feared. What did the eulogist think of him, so that he could now strive to achieve more? While he was clear about his own abilities, how people related to him was important to him. Did they think that he was greater than he really was? Were they getting carried away in their esteem?

Concerning Moshe Rabbeinu, there was no question. He had reached the apex of spiritual achievement. To do so, he devoted all of himself to Hashem, so that he became the consummate eved, servant, the highest accolade one can earn. His passing was unique in the sense that his holy soul, which had descended to this world to be implanted in his body, was returned untarnished, in its pristine self, as it was originally dispatched by

Hashem. This is demonstrated by Moshe meriting misas neshikah, Hashem's affectionate kiss of death.

Such a death is reserved for those who live such a special life as our quintessential teacher and leader. I recently read about the last few hours of Horav Meir Shapiro, zl. It is worth sharing with those who have never heard of it - and to those who have, it is well-worth repeating. The founder of the Daf HaYomi, page a day of Talmud project, passed away shortly after Succos, on the seventh day of Cheshvon. A few hours before his passing, he motioned to his wife to draw closer to his bed. The Rosh Yeshivah could no longer speak. So, with trembling hands, he wrote, "Why are you weeping? Now there will be real joy."

The Rosh Yeshivah then gestured to his talmidim, students, who waited anxiously for some word concerning their Rebbe's deteriorating condition. He wrote once again, "You should all drink a l'chaim (to life)." Immediately, whiskey and cake were brought in and dispersed among all those who merited to be there for this most sublime moment. Brachos, blessings, were recited, and then each student stood before the Rebbe and shook his hand. Rav Meir warmly held each student's hand for a moment, while he looked deeply into each individual student's eyes.

After each student had the opportunity to bid his Rebbe farewell, it became obvious that Rav Meir was struggling to speak. Finally, with great pain, he formed the words, Becha batchu Avoseinu, "Our fathers trusted in You." The students understood that their Rebbe wanted them to begin singing the melody that he had composed to these words.

As the students sang, they began to dance - and they danced as they had never before danced. Tears rolled down their cheeks - their hearts breaking - but, nevertheless, they continued to dance around their Rebbe's bed. While they were dancing, hundreds of other students stood in the next room reciting Tehillim.

With every passing second, the situation worsened. All those in attendance understood that their beloved Rosh Yeshivah was fighting his final battle - and he was losing. In just a few moments, his holy neshamah would be reunited with its Maker. The students were broken; their Rebbe meant so much to them. How could he be taken from them at such a young age?

Perhaps this was the emotion that coursed through the minds of the onlookers. Not so Rav Meir, who upon detecting the student's muffled sobs, motioned for one of them to come closer. Nor mit simchah, "Only with joy," he whispered.

He understood the profundity of the moment - and like Moshe Rabbeinu - he had no regrets. He was ready to serve Hashem - in Heaven. Rav Meir Shapiro died with the words, Nor mit simchah on his lips. These were his last words. For forty-six years, he lived with joy. He died as he had lived - with joy on his lips.

Death is inevitable. How we confront the inevitable depends on how we have lived.

Before the eyes of all Yisrael. (34:12)

The Torah begins with the creation of the world, the creation of mankind, and concludes with death - with the passing of our quintessential leader, Moshe Rabbeinu. The life cycle, from cradle to grave, is exactly that - a cycle. A man is born, lives out his life, and returns sometime later to his source. One ends where the other one starts. A perfect circle is complete in the sense that it unites the beginning with the end. Indeed, there is neither a beginning to a circle, nor is there an end. If one selects a specific point and designates it as the beginning, when he arrives at the end, he will find himself back where he started.

Horav Shlomo Yosef Zevin, zl, observes that V'zos HaBrachah is the only parsha of the Torah that is not read on Shabbos. V'zos HaBrachah is read, instead, on Simchas Torah, because, on this day, we conclude the reading of the Torah, and we dance in a circle by design. This intimates that there is no end to the Torah. Its final words, its closing sentence is, l'einei kol Yisrael, and it immediately begins with Bereishis bara Elokim. Is this really the end? No! Because we now begin with Bereishis. As we dance in a circle on

Simchas Torah, we connect the end with the beginning. Thus, the "eyes of all Yisrael" stay focused on the Bereishis bara Elokim. The beginning declares Hashem as the Creator of the world. This is what we look at as we conclude the circle of life - the beginning.

Death is not an end. It is the beginning of a new spiritual odyssey. The soul returns to its source - the end of the circle. It is now time for a new beginning. As this soul returns, another leaves, thus life goes on - in a circle. When the "eyes of all Yisrael" remain transfixed on the beginning, we realize that life does not come to an abrupt end. It is only beginning. A circle does not end. Wherever one stands in the circle of life, when his name is "called" to return, he is not really leaving. He is merely starting over again. After all, life is a circle.

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Shiurim in Chumash & Navi by Menachem Leibtag
PARSHAT VE-ZOT HA-BRACHA**

Ve-zot ha-bracha is a classic example of a Parsha that almost everyone knows by heart (at least the first three aliyot), but almost no one understands. [That's because it is read numerous times in shul, but its words are very difficult to translate.]

In this week's shiur, we try to 'break ice' by undertaking a basic analysis of the Parsha's structure and theme.

INTRODUCTION

We begin our study with a short discussion of the two obvious problems that one encounters when studying the order of the tribes in these blessings.

First of all, one tribe (**Shimon**) appears to be missing, i.e. his tribe is not even mentioned within Moshe's blessings. Secondly, the order of these blessings (tribe by tribe) proceeds in what appears to be a rather random sequence.

To better appreciate these two problems, the following table lists the tribes according to their order in Ve-zot ha-bracha. To accentuate the apparent lack of sequence in this list, next to each 'shevet' [tribe] we note their respective matriarch and relative position according to birth.

THE ORDER OF THE TRIBES

SHEVET MATRIARCH & position of birth

- 1 Reuven Leah 1
- 2 Yehuda Leah 4
- 3 Levi Leah 3
- 4 Binyamin Rachel 12
- 5 Yosef Rachel 11 [Efraim & Menashe]
- 6 Zevulun Leah 6
- 7 Yissachar Leah 5
- 8 Gad Zilpa 9
- 9 Dan Bilha 7
- 10 Naftali Bilha 8
- 11 Asher Zilpa 10

* Note that the tribe of SHIMON is missing!

Carefully study this list. On the one hand, the order of the "shvatom" is certainly not random, as the children of the maidservants (Bilha & Zilpa) are grouped at the end, while the children of Rachel and 'sandwiched' together between Leah's elder and younger children.

One the other hand, there doesn't seem to be an apparent reason for Rachel's children to be 'inserted' in this manner. And of course, as you noticed, Shimon is 'missing'!

Furthermore, although it's pretty clear why Reuven is first, as he is the oldest, why does Moshe skip from Reuven to Yehuda? Likewise, why does Binyamin precede his older brother Yosef, and why do the children of Rachel 'interrupt' Moshe's blessings to the children of Leah?

Finally, why does Zevulun precede Yissachar, why does Gad precede Dan, and why do the children of Bilha 'interrupt' the children of Zilpa?

Even in Parshat Bamidbar, where we find the tribes listed in various orders as they prepare to organize the camp around the Mishkan (see TSC shiur), we find no list that is even slightly resembles this order of the blessings in Ve-zot ha-bracha.

In summary, although the list is not altogether random, it certainly doesn't follow any apparent logic. In our shiur, we attempt to identify its rationale. To that end, we must first consider the nature and purpose of these blessings.

FROM YAAKOV TO MOSHE

Ve-zot ha-bracha is not the first time in Chumash where we find that each tribe receives a blessing. Recall that back in Parshat Va'ychi, Yaakov Avinu blesses each tribe before his death. Unlike Moshe, however, Yaakov addresses his children in almost exact age order: Reuven, Shimon, Levi, Yehuda, Zevulun & Yissachar [note slight deviation], Dan (first born of Bilha), Gad (first born of Zilpa), Asher, and Naftali.

[The only problem, of course, is that Zevulun precedes his older brother Yissachar (for an explanation, see Seforno Br. 49:13, based on Midrash Tanchuma Vayechi 11.). Although Gad & Asher precede Naftali, they may very well have been born first, depending on how one understands Breishit 30:5-10.]

The reason why Yaakov blesses his children in 'age order' is quite simple. As we explained in our shiur on Parshat Va'ychi, Yaakov (prior to his death) blesses each son according to his individual potential, as exhibited and manifest throughout each respective son's life. As those blessings related to the personal destiny of each son, it makes sense that they would follow (more or less) in the order of oldest to youngest.

Moshe, by contrast, is not the 'dying father' of twelve sons. He is rather the 'departing leader' of twelve tribes to whom he has given the Torah and who are about to conquer and occupy the Land of Israel. As we would expect, his blessings accurately reflect the setting and circumstances in which they are administered.

In the first part of our shiur, we will show how each of Moshe's blessings relates in one form or another to either the tribe's forthcoming military conquest of the land; or to their leadership potential; or to the quality of the specific 'nachala' (territory) that they are destined to inherit.

Afterward, we will show how these observations will enable us to answer our original questions concerning the strange order of the tribes in these blessings.

THE 'GIST' OF THE BLESSINGS

Let's quickly review the gist of each blessing, one tribe at a time, noting how each blessing relates to either the defining characteristic that tribe's inheritance [nachala], or to the tribe's role in the imminent conquest of the land.

REUVEN

At first glance, Moshe Rabbeinu's opening remarks to the tribe of Reuven appears to be simply a blessing of 'life'.

"Let Reuven live and not die, and let his numbers be counted" (see Devarim 33:6).

Nonetheless, both Rashi and Seforno explain how these remarks actually relate to the forthcoming conquest of the land.

Rashi explains how this blessing addresses Moshe's concern that Reuven would not receive a nachala at all - as he may have lost that right when Yaakov cursed him (on account of his sin with Bilha / see Breishit 49:3-4), just as he forfeited his claim to the 'bechora' (birthright). [See also Targum Onkelos.]

Furthermore, the fact that Reuven had already 'set up camp' **outside** the biblical borders of Eretz Canaan (in Transjordan) provided yet another reason to doubt whether Reuven would truly become an 'official' tribe of Israel. Hence, Rashi explains that the purpose of Moshe's blessing was to counter these fears, thus reassuring Reuven that he will remain 'alive,' i.e. a full fledged member of the tribes of Israel.

In contrast, Chizkuni offers a 'military' explanation for this blessing. Considering that the tribe of Reuven had recently promised to 'take the front line' in the forthcoming battles to conquer Eretz Canaan [i.e. to be the 'chalutz' - see Bamidbar 32:20-32], Moshe bestows upon them a blessing of 'life' to help them survive this most dangerous task, praying in their behalf that their 'number' ['mispar'] - population - should remain the same after battle as it was beforehand. [For a similar approach, see commentary of Rabbenu Yosef Bechor Shor.]

For the purpose of our shiur, note how both commentators make every effort to relate this blessing (and all the others) to the forthcoming events, as the twelve tribes now prepare to conquer the land.

YEHUDA

"Hear Hashem the [battle] cry of Yehuda and help him lead his people. Make his hands strong for him, and help him against his enemies" (33:7).

[See Rashi and Ibn Ezra]

Clearly, the bracha to Yehuda relates to his military leadership, as Moshe foresees that the soldiers of Yehuda will be particularly enthusiastic and diligent in the conquest of their portion in the Land (see Yehoshua chapter 14 and Sefer Shoftim chapter 1).

LEVI

After a short reference to Aharon, the tribal leader of the tribe of Levi (and "kohen gadol" /high priest), Moshe addresses Levi as follows:

"They shall teach Your laws to Yaakov and Your instructions to Israel; they shall offer **ktoret**... and whole-offerings [**olot**] on the **mizbeiach**. God should bless his **chayil** and favor his undertakings. Help him smite the loins of those who rise against him, and don't allow his enemies to succeed" (33:8-11).

This blessing to Levi focuses on this tribe's responsibility to provide spiritual leadership, i.e. to teach God's laws and officiate in His Temple. Interestingly, however, even this function is presented in 'military' jargon [e.g. the word 'cheilo' in 33:11].

[Note also 33:9, an apparent reference to Bnei Levi's preparedness to prosecute and execute those who sinned at chet ha-egel (see Rashi 33:9 and Shmot 32:26-29). Indeed, their conduct at that point was of a 'military' nature.]

Whereas all other tribes earned their "nachala", a specific, designated portion of land, shevet Levi was scattered among the various tribes in order to serve as teachers throughout the country (note Devarim 18:1-2, "Hashem hu nachlatam"!). Understandably, then, their blessing relates to their leadership role, rather than their allocated portion in the land.

BINYAMIN

"Beloved to God, He shall allow His **Shchina** to dwell securely within him. He constantly protects [=surrounds] him, as He rests between his shoulders" (33:12).

This blessing (recently brought to fame by a popular Avraham Fried song 'U-le'Binyamin amar...') focuses on the special quality of Binyamin's nachala, its designation to house the bet ha-mikdash (God's Temple) in Yerushalayim.

YOSEF [Efraim & Menashe]

"God's blessing is given to his land, with the bounty of dew from heaven... with the bounty of the earth in its fullness...

His 'horns' are like those of a wild ox, with them he gores other nations... these are the 'tens of thousands' of Efraim and these are the 'thousands' of Menashe" (see 33:13-17).

The precise translation of this blessing is somewhat elusive, but it clearly speaks of the bountiful nature of the nachala apportioned to Yosef. It appears that Yosef will bear the responsibility of forming the backbone of Israel's agrarian economy (as was Yosef's job in Egypt - see Or Hachayim here).

The final verse alludes to Yosef's military competence that will grant him victory over enemy nations. Specifically, Rashi understands the final

pasuk as a reference to the leadership of Yehoshua - a descendant of Efraim - who led Am Yisrael in their conquest of Eretz Canaan.

ZEVULUN & YISSACHAR

"Rejoice Zevulun as you go out [to war; compare with Bamidbar 27:17] and Yissachar in your tents. [Their prosperity will catalyze] a call to other nations to ascend God's mountain [see Ibn Ezra & Seforno] where they will offer proper sacrifices, for they draw from the riches of the sea and from the hidden hoards of the sand" (33:18).

The opening sentence may refer to Zevulun's military prowess [see Ibn Ezra's interpretation, in contrast to Rashi's, and see Shoftim 5:18], but the conclusion of the pasuk clearly relates to the importance of his nachala. Their territory was situated along the sea [the coast from Caesarea to the Acco/Haifa bay area], thus forming Israel's gateway to foreign trade and, consequently, economic relations with other nations. Moshe anticipates that these business alliances will lead to the recognition on the part of those nations of the God of Israel - the primary long-term goal of Am Yisrael (see Devarim 4:5-8 & previous shiurim on Parshiot Noach & Lech Lecha).

The nachala of Yissachar, too, facilitates international trade (and influence), as it lies in Emek Yizrael, at the heart of the **via maris** - the ancient trade route connecting Egypt with Mesopotamia. [See Seforno 33:19, who alludes to Yissachar's role in international trade.]

Furthermore, Rashbam (Breishit 49:14) understands the 'tents' of Yissachar as a reference to this tribe's involvement in agriculture, while Rabbenu Yosef Bechor Shor (here) associates Yissachar's tents with the cattle industry (compare with Breishit 4:20). All this, too, relates directly to Yissachar's portion: the fertile soil of Emek Yizreel renders it an ideal location for both agriculture and livestock breeding.

GAD

"Blessed be He who enlarges [the nachala of] Gad. He is poised like a lion to tear off arm and scalp [i.e. military strength]. He chose for himself the best [nachala]..." (33:20-21). [The rest of the pasuk is very difficult, but most likely refers to his nachala as the chosen spot for Moshe's burial site - see Rashi.]

Once again, Moshe's bracha focuses on the unique nature of the given tribe's nachala, Gads initiative to widen his inheritance in Transjordan, as well as their military capabilities.

DAN

"Dan is like a lion's whelp that leaps from the Bashan" (see 33:22).

Dan's blessing obviously relates to their military might and the location of their nachala - at the western slopes of the Golan Heights [Bashan is the biblical name for the Golan - see Devarim 3:8-10], today the area of Tel Dan and Kiryat Shmona in the Chula valley of the Upper Galil. Anyone who has been on a tiul to the Golan, and visited the old Syrian bunkers that overlooked the Chula valley and the area of Tel Dan and Kiryat Shmona, can easily understand how the phrase 'yezaneq min ha-Bashan' describes the nachala of Dan.

[Even though Devarim 4:43 indicates that the Golan region itself was included in Menashe's nachala, not Dan's, the Targum here explains, our pasuk means that Dan lived near the Bashan, and the land in his region was watered by the streams flowing down from the Bashan. Note as well that Ibn Ezra (and others) explain Moshe's bracha as having nothing to do with Dan's actual portion, rather the tribe's military strength. He interprets 'yezaneq min ha-Bashan' as modifying the lion to whom Dan is compared, rather than the tribe of Dan itself.]

Additionally, Rashi explains the lion metaphor as a reference to Dan's location on the border, standing guard against enemy intrusion. [Almost prophetic!]

NAFTALI

"Naftali should be satiated [for his nachala] is full of God's blessing, to the west and south (of his brother Dan) he shall/must conquer his land" (33:23). [See Ibn Ezra's comments regarding the word 'yarasha']

[See also Ramban - note why he quotes the Midrash.]

Again, Moshe's bracha relates to the agricultural potential of this nachala and the conquest of that portion. [Parenthetically, Naftali's nachala is situated in the fertile and beautiful region of the Upper Galil, to the west and south of Tel Dan (including Zefat & Har Meron).]

ASHER

"May Asher be the most blessed of sons, may he be the favorite of his brothers and may he dip his foot in oil. Iron and copper are your doorbolts, and your security should last for all your days" (33:24).

These psukim require further elucidation, but what is clear is that they relate to two unique characteristics of Asher's nachala: its abundance of olive trees (and hence olive oil) and its location on Israel's northern border. [See Ramban's interpretation, that Asher's portion guards the country's northern border (and thus serves as an 'iron lock' securing the country). See also Seforno, who explains that the presence of iron & copper locks on their homes reflects the wealth of their land.]

SUMMARY

As we review all these brachot, it becomes clear that they all focus on the nature of each nachala and the conquest of the land. In fact, almost all the commentators, especially Ibn Ezra, Chizkuni, and Seforno (in addition to Rashi and Ramban), relate to this aspect of the nachalot throughout their interpretation of these psukim.

These observations can help us understand the underlying intention of the blessings that Moshe Rabbeinu bestows at this time. Aware of the military capabilities of each tribe and the anticipated geographic division of the land (note 34:1-4), Moshe blesses each tribe - encouraging them to achieve their fullest potential in the forthcoming conquest of Eretz Canaan.

[In essence, that is what 'blessings' are all about - i.e. the fulfillment of personal potential!]

Based on this understanding, we can return to our original question and make some sense out of the seemingly random order of their presentation.

'INHERIT' ORDER

As these blessings relate to the "nachalot" - the upcoming inheritance of each tribe, we posit that the order of the blessings follow according to the order of the geographical location of those nachalot.

[To appreciate how this theory explains their order, it is recommended that you follow this section of the shiur while referring to a map of the nachalot of the tribes in the Land of Israel.]

Recall from the opening lines of the Parasha - how Reuven is the first tribe to receive Moshe's blessing. Reuven is first, not just because he is the oldest, but rather because Reuven was the first tribe to conquer his portion, as recorded in Bamidbar chapter 32 (& Devarim 3:16-19).

If this theory was correct, we would now expect Gad to receive the next blessing (who joined Reuven in their conquest of Transjordan). Instead, we find that the next blessing goes to Yehuda (see 33:6-8). However, one can suggest a very simple explanation - as there appears to be an 'overriding' rule that governs the order of these blessing - that Moshe first blesses the tribes from Yaakov's wives (i.e. the children of Leah & Rachel) - and only afterward blesses the tribes from the maidservants (Bilha & Zilpa).

This principle beautifully explains the order when Moshe finally blesses these four tribes (from the maidservants) towards the end of the Parasha. Note how he begins by blessing Gad (see 33:20), because they conquered their nachala first (in Transjordan) - even though Dan is the older brother (and the head of the camp in the desert /see Bamidbar chapter 2!).

These observations can also help clarify the content of Reuven's blessing. Moshe must emphasize that **even though** Reuven's nachala lies outside the borders of Eretz Canaan, they retain their status as an 'official' shevet (as we explained earlier).

YEHUDA FIRST

Once we skip Gad, Reuven is followed by **Yehuda** - the first of the tribes to successfully conquer their portion of land, as detailed both in Sefer Yehoshua (chapters 14->15) and in Sefer Shoftim (1:1-15). This also explains why Yehuda's blessing focuses on their military power.

Next, Moshe Rabbeinu works his way 'up north', from Yehuda (in the south) through Binyamin to Efraim and Menashe. This principle (of geographical order) explains why Binyamin precedes Yosef, for his nachala is located north of Yehuda, but south of Efraim. We'll soon continue with the tribes located to the north of Efraim, but first, we must explain what happened to Shimon & Levi.

A 'SOLUTION' FOR SHIMON

Our approach thus far can also provide us with a clue as to why Shimon does not receive a blessing in Ve-zot Ha-bracha. Considering that Shimon's nachala is later included (almost 'swallowed up') within the borders of Yehuda (see Yehoshua 19:1 & 19:9!), one could conclude that Shimon basically never received their own nachala (a fulfillment of Yaakov's 'blessing' to Shimon in Breishit 48:5-7). Furthermore, in the aftermath of 'chet bnot Mo'av' their numbers were severely reduced (see Bamidbar 26:14, compare 1:23!), hence we can conclude that their army may not have played a major role in the conquest of the land as well.

[Note Rashi on 33:7 (towards the end), where he quotes a Midrash Tehillim that the bracha to Shimon is actually 'included' within the bracha to Yehuda: 'shma Hashem' contains the first letters of Shimon's name, 'shin.mem.ayin'. In fact, the same wording is used when Shimon is first named by his mother: 'ki **shama Hashem** ki snu'a anochi' (see Breishit 29:33!).]

As Shimon's conquest and inheritance during the time period of Yehoshua will be almost negligible, his tribe is totally skipped.

WHY LEVI & BINYAMIN COME FIRST

Now, we must explain why Levi follows immediately after Yehuda, before all the other shvatim.

To do so, we must first explain why according to our theory (that the blessings relate specifically to the nachalot) -Levi should not have received any blessing, for they were not destined to receive any portion in the land - as Moshe himself has stated earlier:

"The kohanim-levi'im - the entire tribe of Levi - shall not receive a nachala with the rest of Israel ... God is his nachala, as He spoke to him" (see Devarim 18:1-2).

However, a closer analysis of this pasuk can provide us with a very meaningful reason for not only the nature of Moshe's blessing to Levi, but also its position! Note how the tribe of Levi did, indeed receive a nachala - not a tract of land, but rather 'nachalat Hashem' - i.e. as a tribe, they are destined to serve the people as God's representatives.

Towards that purpose, God separated the entire shevet of Levi to serve in the bet ha-mikdash and to teach Torah to Bnei Yisrael; and hence, this responsibility is considered their nachala.

Even though this special nachala does not carry a distinct geographical border, nonetheless the bet ha-mikdash ['makom asher yivchar Hashem' / see Devarim chapter 12] was to become the central location for the fulfillment of these responsibilities. Considering that the permanent bet ha-mikdash was destined to be built in Jerusalem [= Har ha-Moria, see Divrei Hayamim II 3:1], Moshe Rabbeinu treats the tribe of Levi as though its nachala will be that city.

As we all know, the city of Jerusalem is located precisely between the borders of the tribes of Yehuda (to the south) and Binyamin (to the north / see Yehoshua 15:8 & 18:16) - therefore his blessing follows that of Yehuda (and precedes the blessing to Binyamin) - and deals with their tribal responsibilities to teach Torah to Israel, and officiate in the Temple:

"...They shall teach Your laws to Yaakov and Your Torah to Israel - they shall put incense and whole burnt-offering upon Your altar. God should bless his substance, and accept the work of his hands..." (see 33:8-11).

Even though the cities wherein the Levites will live are scattered among the tribes, Jerusalem will remain their center. Furthermore, in Sefer Yehoshua we learn how Yehuda becomes the first tribe to supply cities for the levi'im (see Yehoshua 21:1-4). [This may be an additional reason why

Levi follows Yehuda in Ve-zot Ha-bracha.] And it only makes sense that their primary cities would be located nearby Jerusalem - within the tribes of Yehuda and Binyamin.

BINYAMIN

As the order proceeds from south to north, Binyamin receives the next blessing, i.e. following Levi. This 'juxtaposition' to Levi also explains why Moshe's blessing to Binyamin focuses first and foremost on this tribe's role as the territory wherein God will allow His Shchina to dwell (see 33:12-13!) Recall how Jerusalem is located on its southern border, while the mishkan was located in other cities within Binyamin, such as Gilgal, Nov, and Givon. Accordingly, Binyamin's bracha deals exclusively with God's promise that His **Shchina** will dwell within this tribe's borders ['shoulders'].

YOSEF & THE SHOMRON

As we proceed northward from the territory of Binyamin, we enter the region settled by the children of **Yosef**, first Efraim and then Menashe (located farther to the north). Once again, our theory also explains why Moshe's blessing to Yosef focuses primarily on the land's vast agricultural potential and the tribe's military strength.

YISSACHAR & ZEVLUN

To explain why Yissachar and Zevulun follow Menashe, we must consider once again the geography of the land.

Thus far, we have seen how the blessings proceed from north to south, however, as the borders of Efraim & Menashe extend from the Mediterranean Sea to the Jordan River, we have not yet found an example of whether an eastern territory should precede a western one (or visa versa). We do encounter this problem in regard to Yissachar and Zevulun, as both occupy the area north of Yosef's border, Zevulun to the west (along the coast) and Yissachar to the east (in Emek Yizrael until the Jordan River).

As we explained earlier, this territory serves as the gateway to foreign trade, convoys and shipping, as reflected in Moshe's blessings to Yissachar and Zevulun.

Although no 'geographical' reason seems to warrant Zevulun's precedence over his older brother, Yissachar, Moshe Rabbeinu follows the pattern set by Yaakov Avinu, who also blessed Zevulun before Yissachar (see Breishit 49:13-14). It should also be noted that Zevulun precedes Yissachar in Sefer Yehoshua chapter 19, as well, in the context of the apportionment of the land among the tribes.

[Rashi also provides an answer relating to the famous Yissachar/Zevulun 'work/study Torah' arrangement.]

BNEI HA-SHFACHOT

As we explained above, Moshe blesses the children of Yaakov's maidservants only after he completes the blessings to Leah and Rachel's children. However, consistent with his pattern heretofore, he presents his blessings in the order of their nachalot, rather than the order of their births.

Moshe begins this group of shvatim with **Gad**, who, together with Reuven, took their nachala first, in Transjordan, before the other tribes established their settlements. Dan & Naftali follow, as their nachalot are situated to the north of Yissachar & Zevulun. Finally he comes to Asher, whose nachala extends along the entire northern border of Israel (today southern Lebanon).

These geographic considerations explain the progression of Moshe's blessing, in what would otherwise have been considered a very strange internal order.

Furthermore, this analysis also provides us with a better appreciation of the content of these final four blessings, as they focus on the beauty of the land, each tribe's need for expansion, and how they protect Israel's northern and eastern borders. Moshe's blessings thus encourage these tribes, who reside far away from the center of the country, to rise to the challenges that their nachalot present. [Sefer Yehoshua and Sefer Shoftim provide us with numerous examples of how difficult this challenge truly was.]

The OPENER & the FINALE

Now that we have explained the individual brachot and their sequence, we conclude our shiur by taking a quick look at Moshe Rabbeinu's opening and concluding comments, to see how they relate to our discussion thus far.

Moshe introduces his brachot with a four-pasuk 'opener' (see 33:2-5) and a corresponding four-pasuk 'closer' (see 33:26-29). The introductory psukim - the precise translation of which requires further discussion beyond the scope of this shiur - clearly point to Ma'amad Har Sinai and Moshe's role as the transmitter of the laws commanded at Har Sinai.

Moshe's closing remarks focus on God as the Protector of Israel, Who provides close supervision (see 33:26), assistance in battle (see 33:26,27,29), and agricultural and economic prosperity (see 33:26 & 28).

Not only do these opening and closing remarks form the appropriate framework for the individual blessings, they also directly relate to the primary theme of Sefer Devarim (and, for that matter, Chumash as a whole). God has chosen the Jewish nation to represent Him as His model nation to guide mankind in the proper direction. To that end, He gave them the Torah (see 33:2-5), which contains the specific laws whose observance in the Promised Land leads to the realization of that goal. Now, before his death, Moshe blesses Bnei Yisrael that they fulfill that potential, that God assist them in their achievement of these goals, in the nachala they are about to conquer and occupy.

Certainly, a most appropriate way for Moshe Rabbeinu to finish the Torah, and thus conclude his life's mission!

chazak chazak ve-nitchazek
shabbat shalom ve-chag sameiach,
menachem

FOR FURTHER IYUN

A. Be sure to see Ramban & Ibn Ezra on 33:7. Many of the points raised in the above shiur are discussed in their peirushim to this pasuk. The Ramban is rather lengthy, but well worth reading!

B. In the context of the bracha to Reuven - that he should 'live', we mentioned several explanations: either that he should not lose his portion on account of his sin with Bilha, or he should retain his status as part of the twelve tribes in spite of settling in Transjordan, or that his men should survive the dangers of the front line where they stood during the conquest of Eretz Yisrael. Abarbanel adds an additional element to this final approach, that the women and children of Reuven remained behind across the Jordan as the men went to fight in Eretz Yisrael proper (see Bamidbar 32). Moshe thus prays on behalf of the defenseless wives and youngsters who were exposed to the possibility of attack by hostile neighbors.

With respect to the possibility that Moshe was concerned about the Jordan River isolating Reuven from the rest of the nation, see Seforno on this pasuk, who advances a variation of this general approach.

C. Moshe beseeches, "Hear, Hashem, the cry of Yehuda..." There are two ways to explain this 'cry'. In the shiur we followed the approach of Rashi and Ramban, that this 'cry' refers to wartime prayers. Moshe expresses his hope that Hashem will listen to Yehuda's pleas during warfare. Chazal, however, in Masechet Makkot 11b, explain that Moshe here prays for Yehuda's release from the excommunication to which he was subjected as a result of his promise to Yaakov (Breishit 43:9). Based on these two approaches and our discussion of Reuven's bracha, explain the phrase 'Ve-zot li-Yehuda' and the relationship between Moshe's brachot to Reuven and Yehuda. [See Da'at Zkenim.]

D. Targum Yonatan on Devarim 18:2 ('Hashem Hu nachalato') writes that the twenty-four gifts given to the kohanim constitute the nachala of the tribe of Levi. Compare this comment with our understanding of Levi's nachala, and assess this notion in light of Moshe's bracha to Levi and this shiur.

E. Rashi offers one interpretation of the final clause of Levi's bracha (33:11) that it foresees the battle waged by the Chashmonaim (who were kohanim, descendants of Levi) against the Greeks (see also Targum Yonatan). Based on your knowledge of the history of Chanukka and in light of our discussion

in this shiur, explain how this struggle may be viewed as part of Levi's conquest of 'his portion' in Eretz Yisrael. How does this Midrashic approach relate to the pshat of the pasuk as explained in this shiur?

F. A particularly novel interpretation of Binyamin's bracha is offered by Rabbenu Yosef Bechor Shor. He explains the bracha as referring not to Hashem's dwelling in Binyamin's portion, but rather to the constant influx of kohanim and levi'im into the borders of Nachalat Binyamin to serve in the mikdash. (Meaning, 'yishkon' and 'chofef' modify the tribe of Levi, not God.) Thus, the brachot to Levi and Binyamin essentially constitute a single bracha. Explain how this may add to the ideas discussed in this shiur regarding the juxtaposition between these two brachot.

G. The Midrash towards the beginning of Shmot Rabba writes that the name 'Zevulun' refers to the fact "that Hashem had His Shchina dwell among them [Bnei Yisrael]... 'Zevulun' means the bet ha-mikdash, as it says, 'I [Shlomo] have built a 'bet zvu' for You...'"

Explain this association between Zevulun and the mikdash based on Moshe's bracha to this tribe in Ve-zot Ha-bracha.

H. Contrast Targum Onkelos' translation of the expression 'gur aryeh' in Yaakov's bracha to Yehuda (Breishit 49:9) with his explanation of the exact same term in Moshe's bracha to Dan (Devarim 33:22). Explain how this difference may reflect the distinction between Yaakov's brachot and Moshe's, as discussed in this shiur. [See also question K in Further Iyun.]

I. BACK TO SHIMON

We suggested our own reason for Shimon's conspicuous absence from this parsha, but the commentators provide several additional reasons. Rashi cites their sin with bnot Mo'av, the responsibility for which seems to lie with shevet Shimon. Ibn Ezra suggests that Moshe may be following the lead of Yaakov, who cursed Shimon & Levi instead of blessing them. Levi, however, earned Moshe's blessing on account of Aharon, a man of stature with no equal in the tribe of Shimon. [In terms of Reuven, who was also cursed by Yaakov, the Ibn Ezra explains that in reality Yaakov did bless Reuven, and he thus earned Moshe's bracha, as well.]

Rabbenu Yosef Bechor Shor also maintains that Moshe followed Yaakov's lead in withholding a bracha from Shimon, but offers a different explanation for Reuven's right to a bracha. Since Moshe himself ordered the tribe of Reuven to join Gad in the front lines in the conquest of Eretz Yisrael, he had to bless Reuven with military success, just as he blessed Gad.]

Ramban posits an interesting theory - the 'twelve rule' - that whenever the tribes are mentioned, there can be only twelve of them. Usually, Levi is omitted and Yosef is replaced by Efraim & Menashe. But now that all three - Levi, Efraim and Menashe - must be included, one shevet must be dropped.

Shimon, whose nachala, as we have seen, is situated within Yehuda's portion, and who was cursed by Yaakov, serves as the best candidate to forfeit his blessing.

J. One question we have not addressed is why Menashe is not mentioned before Yehuda. After all, Menashe - like Reuven - settled before the other tribes, in Transjordan. This issue relates to the general and more complicated topic concerning nachalat Menashe, why it was divided into two, and how their portion relates (or doesn't relate) to Reuven and Gad's - all beyond the scope of this week's shiur.

K. We noted in the shiur the fundamental distinction between Moshe's brachot in our parsha and Yaakov's blessings to his sons in Parshat Vayechi. The Midrash, however, actually draws a parallel of sorts between these two sets of blessings:

"And this is that which their father [Yaakov] spoke unto them: [Yaakov told his sons,] another man of similar stature is destined to bless you, and from where I have left off he shall begin... " (Breishit Rabba 100:12).

Where in the history of Am Yisrael did Yaakov 'leave off'? Where did Moshe begin? How may this Midrash be understood in light of this shiur?

L. We did not address in the shiur the reason why Moshe felt compelled to divide the tribes into the two groups, the sons of the maidservants and those

of Rachel and Leah. A precedent for this differentiation with regard to Bnei Yisrael's settlement in the land exists back in Parshat Vayechi. Yaakov Avinu bestows upon Yosef the legal status of the bechora, which grants him a double portion in Eretz Yisrael (Breishit 48:5). Divrei Hayamim I 5:1 tells us that the rights of the bechora were taken away from Reuven as a result of his sin with Bilha and transferred to Yosef.

Needless to say, several children - including two firstborns, from both Bilha and Zilpa - were born in between Reuven and Yosef. However, the firstborns of the maidservants did not qualify for the rights of the double nachala. Apparently, although all twelve tribes earned equal membership in Bnei Yisrael, some hierarchical system remained at least with regard to the settlement of the Land. Perhaps for this reason Moshe arranged his blessings for the successful occupation and settlement of Eretz Yisrael according to this division.