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The National Heirloom

V'Zot HaBracha (Deuteronomy 33-34)

Sep 15, 2020 | by **Rabbi Yissocher Frand**

Every little Jewish child learns this verse: Torah tzivah lanu Moshe morashah kehillas Yaakov. The Torah Moshe commanded us is an heirloom for the congregation of Yaakov." Sometimes the word morashah is translated as an inheritance or a heritage, but this is not precise. The exact translation of the word morashah is heirloom.

An heirloom is something we hold precious and dear, something we cherish because it connects us to the treasured past, something we want to pass along to future generations, just as we have received it ourselves from earlier generations.

The Torah is the heirloom of the Jewish people. It is the sublime heirloom, our eternal connection to the Almighty. In the words of the Psalmist (Tehillim 144:15), "Fortunate is the nation that has it so, fortunate is the nation that God is their Lord."

What is an heirloom to the gentile world? I would like to recount a story I once read about a woman who went on her first deer hunt and shot her first deer. She made laborious preparations for this momentous event. She studied a stack of books about deer hunting, and she learned how to shoot a 30-30 Model 94 Winchester rifle that had been handed down in the family for generations.

So what was her heirloom? A 30-30 Model 94 Winchester rifle. Her great-grandfather passed it on lovingly to her grandfather, and her grandfather gave it to her. On the morning of the hunt, she took the rifle apart and lovingly cleaned and oiled it until it gleamed. And then she went out and shot her first deer. A thrilling moment.

How fortunate are we that the Torah is our heirloom! How fortunate are the Jewish people that God is their Lord!

His Finest Moment

The Torah concludes with a stirring eulogy for Moshe, the lawgiver of the Jewish people, "Never again has there arisen in Israel a prophet like Moshe,

whom God knew face to face; all the signs and wonders that God sent him to perform in the land of Egypt against Pharaoh, all his servants and all his land; all the strong hands and great awesome deeds Moshe displayed before the eyes of all Israel."

Each of these phrases, as interpreted by Rashi, recalls a specific aspect of Moshe's greatness, leading step by step to the climax of his epitaph: "before the eyes of all Israel," that he had the courage to smash the Luchos, Tablets of the Ten Commandments, in full view of the Jewish people. When all was said and done, this was the ultimate expression of Moshe's greatness, the most superb act he ever performed.

What was so magnificent about this act that it transcended his Torah and all the great miracles he performed?

The Ateres Mordechai offers a profound insight. Before we begin a project, whether it is a book or a building or anything else, we can consider it critically and objectively. But once the project gets underway, we are no longer so objective. And as the project progresses, our objectivity progressively shrinks – until it completely disappears. After we have written our book, we are so invested that we no longer want to entertain any critical thoughts. We don't want to hear that we made a mistake in this or that we shouldn't have written that. We go to extremes to defend against our critics, although we might have made the same arguments ourselves before the fact.

And what if we publish a work on the Torah or even a single shtickel Torah, an original Torah homily? We are so proud and pleased with ourselves that we will twist and turn and squirm and contort ourselves every which way to make the unworkable work.

Can we imagine then how Moshe must have felt when he came down the mountain with the Ten Commandments? This was what he had been working toward for years. He had sacrificed for these Tablets. He had spent forty days in Heaven without food or drink fending off the angels and securing the Tablets for the Jewish people. This was his magnum opus, his life's work.

Now he comes down the mountain and sees the people worshipping the Golden Calf. He knows instinctively what he must do. He knows that the people are unworthy and that he must smash the Tablets.

And what about all the toil and effort he had invested in them?

He could easily have rationalized to himself, "All right, the people clearly don't deserve the Tablets now, but maybe things will change. What's the point of breaking the Luchos if I might need them again in a day or two? Perhaps I should just put them aside without showing them to the people until they are again deserving. Why ruin a good pair of Tablets?"

But Moshe did not do this. He had absolute integrity. He disregarded all the efforts he had invested in the Tablets. He did not consider that his life's work was going to waste. Truth demanded that he break them, and he did not hesitate to do so.

This was the ultimate virtue the Torah could ascribe to Moshe. The truth, the integrity, the honesty, the clarity of vision uncolored by personal considerations. This was his greatest accomplishment.

I heard a beautiful comment along these lines from Rav Mordechai Gifter. The Talmud tells us (Kiddushin 57a) that Shimon the Amsonite used to develop a secondary meaning from every single occurrence of the Hebrew particle es in the Torah. For instance, in the commandment of honoring parents there is an es, from which he derived the inclusion of older siblings.

One day, he turned his attention to the verse (Devarim 6:13), "Es Hashem Elokecha tira. You shall fear God your Lord." All of a sudden, he said, "This cannot be. There is no secondary recipient of the fear we must feel for Hashem." Therefore, he recanted on all his original derivations, thousand and thousands of insights, because his rule could not be applied consistently to the entire Torah.

And then Rabbi Akiva came along and taught that even in this there could be secondary recipients – Torah scholars! They are worthy of sharing the reverence for the Divine.

Wonderful.

But why, asks Rav Gifter, couldn't Shimon the Amsonite think of this solution? Why was this specialist on the es particle stumped while Rabbi Akiva was able to figure it out?

The answer, says Rav Gifter, is that Rabbi Akiva saw the way Shimon the Amonite dealt with this problem. He saw the tremendous devotion to truth, the inviolable intellectual integrity, the willingness to forfeit many years of effort and creativity if there was a problem with the reasoning. When Rabbi Akiva saw that a Torah scholar could reach such a level of integrity and honesty in defense of the truth of Torah, he realized that Torah scholars too can share in the reverence for the Divine. They can be included in "Es Hashem Elokecha tira."

Customarily, a glass is broken at a Jewish wedding. What is the reason for this custom? The reason most commonly given is to recall the destruction of Yerushalayim during times of rejoicing. One commentator connects this custom to the breaking of the Tablets of the Commandments. Why do we need to be reminded of this event during a wedding?

Perhaps it is because the breaking of the Tablets was such an act of profound honesty and integrity on the part of Moshe. In order for a marriage to work, there is also a need for extraordinary honesty and integrity on the part of both husband and wife. In case of discussion or disagreement, both have to speak and act with absolute honesty and integrity, to be straight and aboveboard, to do what is right rather than what is comfortable and convenient. Both have to be ready to admit their mistakes rather than stand on their pride. Both need to be prepared to let go of their preconceived notions and prejudices and work toward the common good. Both have to be willing to face the truth.

These are not easy demands, but if husband and wife want to gain the most happiness possible from their marriage, they have to find the strength of character in themselves to do these things. The reminder of the breaking of the Tablets is meant to give them courage. If Moshe was ready to break them and let go of all his hopes and dreams for the sake of truth, these two people can find a way to build their marriage on a foundation of truth.

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Covenant & Conversation - Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks

End Without an Ending

What an extraordinary way to end a book: not just any book but the Book of books - with Moses seeing the Promised Land from Mount Nebo, tantalisingly near, yet so far away that he knows he will never reach it in his lifetime. This is an ending to defy all narrative expectations. A story about a journey should end at journey's end, with arrival at the destination. But the Torah terminates before the terminus. It concludes in medias res. It ends in the middle. It is constructed as an unfinished symphony.

We, the readers and listeners, feel Moses' personal sense of incompleteness. He had dedicated a lifetime to leading the people out of Egypt to the Promised Land. Yet he was not granted his request to complete the task and reach the place to which he had spent his life as a leader leading the people. When he prayed, "Let me...cross over and see the good land on the other side of the Jordan," God replied, "Enough! Never speak to Me of this matter again" (Deut. 3:25-26).

Moses - the man who stood before Pharaoh demanding his people's freedom, who was unafraid even to challenge God Himself, who when he came down the mountain and saw the people dancing around the Golden Calf smashed the Divinely-hewn tablets, the holiest object ever to be held by human hands - pleaded for the one small mercy that would give completion to his life's work, but it was not to be. When he prayed for others, he succeeded. When he prayed for himself, he failed. That in itself is strange.

Yet the sense of incompleteness is not merely personal, not just a detail in the life of Moses. It applies to the entire narrative as it has unfolded from the beginning of the book of Exodus. The Israelites are in exile. God charges Moses with the task of leading the people out of Egypt and bringing them to the land flowing with milk and honey, the country He had promised to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. It seems simple enough. Already in Exodus 13, the people have left, sent on their way by a Pharaoh and an Egypt ravaged by plagues. Within days, they hit an obstacle. Ahead of them is the Red Sea. Behind them are the rapidly approaching chariots of Pharaoh's army. A

miracle happens. The sea divides. They pass over on dry land. Pharaoh's troops, their chariot wheels caught in the mud, drown. Now all that stands between them and their destination is the wilderness. Every problem they face - a lack of food, water, direction, protection - is solved by divine intervention mediated by Moses. What is left to tell, if not their arrival?

Yet it does not happen. Spies are sent to determine the best way of entering and conquering the land, a relatively straightforward task. They come back, unexpectedly, with a demoralising report. The people lose heart and say they want to go back to Egypt. The result is that God decrees that they will have to wait a full generation, forty years, before entering the land. It is not only Moses who does not cross the Jordan. The entire people have not done so by the time the Torah ends. That must await the book of Joshua, not itself part of the Torah but rather of the Nevi'im, the later prophetic and historical texts. This, from a literary point of view, is odd. But it is not accidental. In the Torah, style mirrors substance. The text is telling us something profound. The Jewish story ends without an ending. It closes without closure. There is in Judaism no equivalent of "and they all lived happily ever after" (the closest the Bible comes to this is the book of Esther). Biblical narrative lacks what Frank Kermode called "the sense of an ending." [1] Jewish time is open time - open to a denouement not yet realised, a destination not yet reached.

This is not simply because the Torah records history, and history has no end. The Torah is telling us something quite different from history in the way the Greeks, Herodotus and Thucydides, wrote it. Secular history has no meaning. It simply tells us what happened. Biblical history, by contrast, is saturated with meaning. Nothing merely happens *bemikreh*, by chance.

This becomes clearer and clearer as we look, for example, at Genesis. God summons Abraham to leave his land, his birthplace, and his father's house and go "to the land I will show you" (Gen. 12:1). Abraham does so, and by verse 5, he has arrived. This sounds like the end of the story, but it turns out to be hardly the beginning. Almost immediately, there is a famine in the land and he has to leave. The same thing happens to Isaac, and eventually to Jacob and his children. The story that began with a journey to the land ends with the main characters outside the land, with both Jacob (49:29) and Joseph (50:25) asking their descendants to bring them back to the land to be buried.

Seven times, God promises Abraham the land - "Look around from where you are, to the north and south, to the east and west. All the land that you see I will give to you and your offspring forever" (Gen. 13:14-15). Yet when Sarah dies, he has not a single plot of land in which to bury her, and has to buy one at an inflated price. Something similar happens to Isaac and Jacob. Genesis ends as Deuteronomy ends - with the promise but not yet the fulfilment, the hope but not yet the realisation.

So does Tanach as a whole. The second book of Chronicles ends with the Israelites in exile. In its closing verse, the last line of Tanach, Cyrus king of Persia gives permission for the exiles to return to their land: "Anyone of His people among you - may the Lord his God be with him, and let him go up" (II Chr. 36:23). Again, anticipation but not yet reality.

There is something significant here - though it lies so deep it is hard to explain. The Bible is a battle against myth. In myth, time is as it is in nature. It is cyclical. It goes through phases - spring, summer, autumn, winter; birth, growth, decline, death - but it always returns to where it began. The standard plot of myth is that order is threatened by the forces of chaos. In ancient times these were depicted by Greek gods of destruction. In more recent times we have seen the dark forces battled dramatically in Star Wars and Lord of the Rings. The hero challenges them. He slips, falls, almost dies, but ultimately succeeds. Order is restored. The world is once again as it was. Hence the "happily ever after." The future is the restoration of the past. There is a return to order, to the way things were before the threat, but there is no history, no progress, no development, no unanticipated outcome.

Judaism is a radical break with this way of seeing things. Instead, time becomes the arena of human growth. The future is not like the past. Nor can it be predicted, foreseen, the way the end of any myth can be foreseen. Jacob, at the end of his life, told his children, "Gather round, and I will tell you what will happen to you at the end of days" (Gen. 49:1). Rashi, quoting the

Talmud, says: "Jacob sought to reveal the end, but the Divine Presence departed from him." We cannot foretell the future, because it depends on us - how we act, how we choose, how we respond. The future cannot be predicted, because we have free will. Even we ourselves do not know how we will respond to crisis until it happens. Only in retrospect do we discover ourselves. We face an open future. Only God, who is beyond time, can transcend time. Biblical narrative has no sense of an ending because it constantly seeks to tell us that we have not yet completed the task. That remains to be achieved in a future we believe in but will not live to see. We glimpse it from afar, the way Moses saw the holy land from the far side of the Jordan, but like him, we know we have not yet arrived. Judaism is the supreme expression of faith as the future tense.

The nineteenth-century Jewish philosopher Hermann Cohen put it this way: What Greek intellectualism could not create, prophetic monotheism succeeded in creating.... For the Greek, history is oriented solely toward the past. The prophet, however, is a seer, not a scholar.... The prophets are the idealists of history. Their seerdom created the concept of history as the being of the future. (Emphasis added.)[2]

Harold Fisch, the literary scholar, summarised this in a hauntingly beautiful phrase: "the unappreciated memory of a future still to be fulfilled." [3]

Judaism is the only civilisation to have set its golden age not in the past but in the future. We hear this at the beginning of the Moses story, although not until the end do we realise its significance. Moses asks God: What is Your name? God replies: Ehyeh asher Ehyeh, literally, "I will be what I will be" (Ex. 3:14). We assume this means something like "I am what I am - unlimited, indescribable, beyond the reach of a name." That may be part of the meaning. But the fundamental point is: My name is the future. "I am what will be." God is in the call from the future to the present, from the destination to us who are still on the journey. What distinguishes Judaism from Christianity is that in answer to the question "Has the Messiah come?" the Jewish answer is always: Not yet. Moses' death, his unfinished life, his glimpse of the land of the future, is the supreme symbol of the not-yet.

"It is not for you to complete the task, but neither are you free to desist from it" (Mishnah Avot 2:16). The challenges we face as human beings are never resolved simply, quickly, completely. The task takes many lifetimes. It is beyond the reach of a single individual, even the greatest; it is beyond the scope of a single generation, even the most epic. Deuteronomy ends by telling us: "Never again has there arisen in Israel a prophet like Moses" (Deut. 34:10). But even his life was, necessarily, incomplete.

As we see him, on Mount Nebo, looking across the Jordan to Israel in the distance, we sense the vast, challenging truth that confronts us all. Each person has a promised land he or she will not reach, a horizon beyond the limits of his or her vision. What makes this bearable is our intense existential bond between the generations - between parent and child, teacher and disciple, leader and follower. The task is bigger than us, but it will live on after us, as something of us will live on in those we have influenced.

The greatest mistake we can make is to do nothing because we cannot do everything. Even Moses discovered that it was not for him to complete the task. That would only be achieved by Joshua, and even then the story of the Israelites was only just beginning. Moses' death tells us something fundamental about mortality. Life is not robbed of meaning because one day it will end. For in truth - even in this world, before we turn our thoughts to eternal life in the World to Come - we become part of eternity when we write our chapter in the book of the story of our people and hand it on to those who will come after us. The task - building a society of justice and compassion, an oasis in a desert of violence and corruption - is greater than any one lifetime. The Jewish people have returned to the land, but the vision is not yet complete. This is still a violent, aggressive world. Peace still eludes us, as does much else. We have not yet reached the destination, though we see it in the distance, as did Moses. The Torah ends without an ending to tell us that we too are part of the story; we too are still on the journey. And as we reach the Torah's closing lines we know, as did Robert Frost in his famous poem, that:

I have promises to keep,

And miles to go before I sleep.[4]

Shabbat Shalom.

NOTES 1. Frank Kermode, *The Sense of an Ending* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1967). 2. Quoted in Ernst Cassirer, *The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms*, vol. 2, *Mythical Thought* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1953), 120. 3. Harold Fisch, *A Remembered Future* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1984), 19. 4. Robert Frost, "Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening," from *The Poetry of Robert Frost*, ed. Edward Connery Lathem (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1969), 224.

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Growing Each Day

Tishrei 21

Seven days shall you celebrate before Hashem, your God ... and you shall only be joyous (Deuteronomy 16:15).

Many people think of Judaism as being extremely solemn, perhaps not realizing that the essence of Judaism is simchah, joy, and that whatever solemnity there is, is in reality a preparation for joy.

Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch points to a simple fact. The Torah designates one day each for Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur (the second day of Rosh Hashanah is of Rabbinical origin), whereas Succos, the festival of rejoicing, is of seven days' duration.

The Gaon of Vilna was asked which of the six hundred thirteen mitzvot he considered the most difficult to observe. He answered that it was Succos, because for seven consecutive days a person must be in constant joy.

Regardless of what might occur during these days that might make it difficult for a person to feel happy, the mitzvah to rejoice requires him to overcome all obstacles to joy.

The Torah's position is that joy is not simply a spontaneous feeling that accompanies pleasant experiences. Joy requires work: meditation on why a person who is privileged to serve God should rejoice. Joy can be achieved even under adverse circumstances. This is something which is expected not only of great tzaddikim, but also of every Jew.

On Succos we must make the necessary effort to be in constant joy throughout the entire festival, and we should learn therefrom how to generate joy all year round.

Today I shall ...try to find ways to bring more joy into my life, and strive to achieve joy even when circumstances are not conducive thereto.

fw from hamelaket@gmail.com

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subject: Weekly Parsha from Rabbi Berel Wein

Home Weekly Parsha VZOT HABBACHA 5781

Rabbi Wein's Weekly Blog

It is interesting that our great leader and teacher Moshe followed the lead of our father Jacob when it came to blessing the Jewish people before he left the world. The blessings that Moshe bestowed were individual and particular.

Each tribe was given its own blessing and its mission.

Every human being is different, and even the greatest amongst us who, on the surface, appears similar, nevertheless, is never identical. One of the great tragedies in human life is when one person feels himself or herself to be a square peg in a round hole - ill fitted for the life one is leading and for the profession or work one is pursuing

Most of us, unfortunately, make some sort of peace with such a situation, and suffer the consequences throughout our productive lives. There are rare individuals who can change course in the midstream of life itself, and pursue their natural abilities and true vision, despite all the obstacles that undoubtedly present themselves.

The import of the blessing of Moshe to the Jewish people, is that each of the tribes, as well as the individuals who make up those tribes, should be true unto themselves. They should accept and follow their mission, both national and personal, that the Lord set out for them by their genetic traits and personal God-given talents. Conformity stifles all creativity, and without

creativity there can never be progress in human affairs, whether spiritual or physical.

Moshe loves the Jewish people. He has proven his love for them repeatedly during his 40 years as their leader and mentor. This final Torah reading is his last and perhaps most soaring expression of love for his people. A lesser person would, perhaps, feel pains of remorse and even revenge for the treatment he received during his 40-year career as the leader of the people. He would be justified in feeling unappreciated, and that he, somehow, never received recognition from those that he served so loyally and skillfully for so many decades.

However, that would not conform to the character trait of Moshe, who is the greatest of all human beings. It is about him that the Torah testifies to his natural human ego, i.e. that there never arose such a prophet within the Jewish people before him nor will there arise another one after him. In his great vision of prophecy, Moshe identifies the talents and mission of each of the varying tribes of Israel, and properly assigns to them their appropriate role in building a holy nation and a kingdom of priests. By so doing, he is fulfilling his final and perhaps greatest act of love for his people, by allowing for the diversity and creativity of human beings to function and build a greater and holy society.

Shabbat shalom Chag Sameach Rabbi Berel Wein

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<http://www.ravaviner.com/> Yeshivat Ateret Yerushalayim From the teachings of the Rosh Yeshiva Ha-Rav Shlomo Aviner Shlit"a

Rav Aviner

Question: Should we Daven for President Donald Trump, who is sick with Corona?

Answer: The answer is divided into three parts.

A. Firstly, do we pray for non-Jews? Ha-Rav Ovadiah Yosef already answered this question regarding a Druze soldier in Tzahal who was killed. He says it is certainly permissible, and is even a Mitzvah as it says in Sefer Chasidim (beginning of Siman #790). And he also brings as a proof from the Yerushalmi (Megillah 3:7) that on Purim we say: "May Charvorna be remembered for good", since he spoke out against the hater of Israel – Haman, and this is true all the more so for the Druze soldiers who risk their lives to protect the Nation of Israel. It is a Mitzvah to pray for their souls (Shut Yabia Omer Vol. 10, Yoreh Deah #55. Chazon Ovadiah - Avelut Volume 3, p. 238). Rav Ovadiah also rules this way for a convert to Daven for his non-Jewish parents (Shut Yechaveh Daat 6:60). Ha-Rav Chaim Kanievsky also ruled that one may Daven for his non-Jewish neighbor who was sick (Derech Sicha Volume 1, p. 544).

By the way, Ha-Rav Kanievsky is also ill with Corona, and we should certainly Daven for him: Shematyahu Yosef Chaim Ben Pasha Miriam (without a title since there is no haughtiness before Hashem. Sefer Chadisim #800. Birkei Yosef, Yoreh Deah 240:4. And Ha-Rav Avraham Dov Auerbach, Av Beit Din of Tiveria, once wrote me a Teshuvah and at the end added a request to Daven for his great father, and wrote: "Shlomo Zalman Ben Tzvia", without a title, even though his father was Gadol Ha-Dor. Brought in Shut Hagrada, p. 64).

By the way, I was asked: Is President Trump the #1 person sick with Corona? And I answered: It is possible to say this about Ha-Rav Chaim Kanievsky Shlit"a. One is the highest political leader and the other is the highest spiritual leader. And what determines history - politics or the spirit? The spirit!

B. Ha-Rav Yitzchak Zilberstein, Rav of Ramat Elchanan in Bnei Brak, was already asked if one may Daven for President Trump's recovery, and he responded that one is OBLIGATED to do so, as gratitude for his support of Israel, moving the US Embassy to Yerushalayim, recognizing the Jewish communities in Yesha and the Golan, etc.

C. The final question is where to Daven for him since the Mi She-Berach for the ill includes the phrase "With all of Israel his brothers". When the Governor of Connecticut, Ella Grasso, was ill with cancer the local Rabbis

asked Ha-Rav Yosef Soloveichik if they could recite a Mi She-Berach for her. He answered that they could, but not with the same prayer since that prayer is for all Jews. He wrote a special Mi She-Berach for her, and said that one should say her first and last name, and not her mother's name, which is the way that Jews are identified.

Ha-Rav Avigdor Nevenzal, Rav of the Old City, however, wrote to us that a non-Jew could be mentioned after that phrase. And Ha-Rav Zilberstein added that President Trump should be referred to with his father's name: Donald Jon Ben Fred Trump.

Each person should follow his local Rabbi's ruling.

fw from hamelaket@gmail.com

from: Rabbi Chanan Morrison <chanan@ravkooktorah.org>

to: rav-kook-list@googlegroups.com subject: [Rav Kook Torah]

Like Doves Flying Home - Rav Kook Torah

In the 1930s, a group of new immigrants visited Rav Kook in Jerusalem. The Jewish refugees had fled Germany, forced to leave behind most of their wealth and property.

As the chief rabbi met with them, he felt the depth of their dejection and unhappiness.

Wishing to boost their spirits, Rav Kook quoted Isaiah's comforting words of consolation. With poetic imagery, the prophet described Jerusalem's amazement as her children - the Jewish people - suddenly return after long years of exile:

אַרְבֵּי־בַת־יְהוָה וְכִי־וָיָם אֶל מִי אֵלֶיהָ קָעַב הַעוֹפִינָה "Who are these? They fly like clouds, like doves returning to their cotes!" (Isaiah 60:8)

What is the difference, Rav Kook asked the new arrivals, between the flight of a cloud and that of a dove? Why did Isaiah use these two analogies?

Clouds and Doves

A cloud, he explained, moves involuntarily. Buffeted by storms and strong winds, clouds are pushed from place to place.

The dove, however, is a different story. It flies where it wishes to travel. Longing for home, the dove returns to its beloved nest.

Isaiah foresaw that the Jews returning to the Land of Israel would not be a homogenous group. Some would arrive charged with idealism. Stirred by powerful yearnings to return to their homeland, they would come like doves returning to their cotes.

But other Jews would migrate because violent storms uprooted them from their countries. With few available options, they would find themselves in the Land of Israel, wandering like the involuntary movement of clouds.

Rav Kook then spoke directly to the new immigrants:

Even those who come like displaced clouds can find within themselves the longings of a dove wanting to come home. Once you have discovered these aspirations within, you will be able to make your homes here in joy and happiness. As it says,

"Those whom God redeemed will return.

Singing, they will enter Zion;

everlasting joy will crown their heads.

Gladness and joy will overtake them,

while sorrow and sighing will flee away." (Isaiah 51:11)

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Parsha Parables By Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky

Making It By Breaking It

Parshas Vzot Habracha

(5759) By Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky

The last verses of the Torah encapsulate a glorious career of leadership of the father of all prophets, Moshe, into a few brief sentences. "Never has there risen in Israel a prophet as Moses whom Hashem had known face to face: as apparent by all the signs and wonders that Hashem had sent him to perform in the land of Egypt against Pharaoh and all his courtiers and all his land. And by all the strong hand and awesome power that Moshe performed before the eyes of Israel" (Deuteronomy 34:10-12).

Powerful descriptive. But it is as cryptic as it is powerful. What is the strong hand and that Moshe performed before the eyes of all Israel? Does it refer to the horrific plagues brought on Egypt? Perhaps it refers to the splitting of the sea or the opening of the earth to swallow Korach and his rebellious cohorts? Rashi tells us that the words “Moshe performed before the eyes of Israel” refers to something totally different, perhaps very mortal. Rashi explains that the posuk (verse) refers to the smashing of the tablets upon descending Mount Sinai and seeing the nation frolic before the Golden Calf. He quotes the verse “and I smashed the tablets before your eyes” (Deuteronomy 9). Rashi’s comment evokes many questions. Why is smashing the Luchos counted as an awe-inspiring feat? And more important, is this the final way to remember Moshe the man who smashed the Luchos? Is that the parting descriptive of Judaism’s greatest leader?

Rabbi Yisrael Lipkin of Salant, was Rav in a city when a typhus epidemic erupted. Despite the peril of the contagious disease, Rabbi Lipkin went together with a group of his students to aid the sick, making sure they had food and clothing. The roving first-aid committee imposed strict restrictions upon the townsfolk, imploring them to eat properly every day in order to ward off immunological deficiencies.

Yom Kippur was fast approaching, and Rabbi Lipkin decreed that due to the menacing disease, absolutely no one was to fast on Yom Kippur despite it being the holiest day of the year.

The town’s elders were skeptical. They felt that Rabbi Salanter had no right to impose such a ruling on those who were not afflicted. Despite their protestations, Rabbi Salanter was unfazed. In fact he made his point in a very dramatic way.

On Yom Kippur morning, immediately after the shacharis services, he went up to the bimah, made kiddush, drank the wine, and ate a piece of cake! Immediately, the townsfolk were relieved. They went to their homes and followed suit.

The elders in the town were outraged at this seemingly blatant violation of Jewish tradition. They approached

Rabbi Lipkin to protest his disregard for the sanctity of the day, but Rabbi Lipkin remained adamant. “I have taken a group of students for the last month, and together we have attended to scores of typhus victims. I guaranteed every mother that each of their children will return home healthy. On my guarantee not one of those students became ill!”

He turned to the elders and declared. “When you are able to make such guarantees then you can tell me the laws against eating on Yom Kippur!”

The Torah ends with the greatness of Moshe. It refers to his great accomplishments as his Yad haChazaka, his strong hand before the eyes of Israel — the breaking of the two Tablets of Law. Moshe’s greatness was not only knowing how to accept the Ten Commandments, but when to smash them as well. And though not every one of us is equipped with the ability to overrule a practice or tradition, Klall Yisrael knows that when the time to act is called for the great ones will arise to build and cure by smashing what needs to be broken. Because whether it is breaking a fast or breaking the tablets, it takes a great man to understand the time to build and an even greater man to know when it is time to tear down.

Chag Sameach Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky

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The Torah Is Not Yerusha – Only Morasha

Parshas Vzot Habracha

(5767) By Rabbi Yissocher Frand

The Torah Is Not Yerusha – Only Morasha

The Torah reading on Simchas Torah contains the well known pasuk [verse]: “The Torah was commanded to us by Moshe, a Morasha [inheritance] to the Congregation of Yaakov.” [Devorim 33:4] There is an interesting teaching in

the Talmud Yerushalmi: Everywhere we find the word morasha, it connotes a weakening of the idea of inheritance (lashon deeha) [Bava Basra 8:2]. Morasha is a peculiar word. It is not easy to translate. It is significantly different than the word yerusha [inheritance]. The connotation is that one has less ownership in an object that has come to him as a “morasha” than he does in an item that comes to him as a “yerusha.”

The Jerusalem Talmud is not referring to the source in our pasuk in Zos HaBracha but rather to a pasuk in Parshas VaEra: “And I will give it (referring to the Land of Israel) to you as a morasha.” [Shmos 6:8] The Yerushalmi points out that the people who were given this promise never made it to the Land of Israel. Virtually the entire generation who left Egypt died out in the Wilderness. How then can the Torah make the statement that it will be given to them as a morasha? The Yerushalmi thus cites this as proof for the difference in nuance between yerusha and morasha. Had the Torah promised Eretz Yisrael to those who left Egypt as a yerusha, it would have belonged to them with no ifs, ands, or buts. However, the Torah used the weaker form — morasha, meaning that it will not necessarily be yours. In truth, it never became theirs.

It only became theirs to the extent that they gave it to their children. This in fact is the major connotation of the word morasha. The word implies “it is yours – sometimes literally and sometimes only to the extent that you pass it on to your children without ever having taken possession.”

The Yerushalmi then questions this explanation by citing our pasuk regarding the Torah being a “morasha for the Congregation of Yaakov.” The Yerushalmi answers that in fact this translation of ‘morasha’ applies to Torah as well!

Torah is NOT a yerusha. Just because my father had the Torah does not mean that I will have the Torah. Sometimes a person only has the Torah as a ‘morasha’. This means that if a person sweats over Torah and makes the effort to understand Torah and puts in the hours required to master Torah, then Torah actually becomes his. But there is no guarantee. Torah is not a no-strings-attached inheritance (yerusha). Without the sweat and the hours, Torah will only be something that the person can potentially pass on to the next generation (morasha).

Chazal teach a tradition based on the pasuk, “This Torah will not depart from your mouth or the mouths of you children or the mouths of your grandchildren forever” [Yehoshua 1:8]: If three generations are committed to learning Torah, then the Torah will never leave that person’s family. The Talmud [Bava Metzia 85a] summarizes this idea with the expression “The Torah returns to its host” (Torah chozeres al achsania shelah).

Someone once asked the Chofetz Chaim the very obvious and pointed question that we know people who descend from many generations of Torah scholars who are themselves ignorant of Torah. Unfortunately, we see millions of Jews that fit into this category. There are families that bear the name of prestigious Gedolim [Torah greats], who today may not even know what an Aleph looks like. What then does it mean “Torah chozeres al achsania shelah”?

The Chofetz Chaim explained that the Gemara’s analogy is very precise. The Torah is like a guest seeking its host’s home. Sometimes a guest knocks on one’s door. If no one answers the door, the guest will not come in.

“Torah chozeres al achsania shelah” means that if Torah has been in a family for three generations, the Torah will come “knocking on that family’s door” in future generations. But still, the younger generation must open the door for the guest. The guest must still be invited in by each new generation. Unfortunately, this does occur. There is knocking. There are opportunities. But the door does not get opened. Torah is not a yerusha. It is only a morasha. The difference is that the former is automatic, while the latter requires effort. If a person does not make the effort, his relationship to Torah might only be to the extent that he will pass it on to subsequent generations.

The Value of an Unknown Burial Place

In Zos HaBracha, the Torah teaches that the burial place of Moshe Rabbeinu is not known. [Devorim 34:6]

I read an interesting story recently about someone who was driving in Eretz Yisrael in the Golan Heights. He came to an intersection and picked up two

Israeli soldiers who were hitchhiking. The soldiers piled into the back seat with their M-16s and started up a conversation.

As it turned out, the soldiers were not Jews, they were Druze. The Druze are loyal citizens of the State of Israel and serve in the Israel Defense Forces. They also have a difficult history with the Arabs.

The Druze soldiers explained that they have their own religion. They are not Moslem. The “father” of their religion is Yisro. They had a nice discussion and as they got to their destination and started leaving the car, the soldiers left the Jewish driver with a parting thought: “Our religion has something over your religion. Not only do we have something over your religion, we have something over the Christians and the Moslems as well. We know where the ‘father’ of our religion is buried. (Yisro is buried in the area around Teverya.) You do not know where Moshe is buried. The Christians do not know where the founder of their religion is buried. The Moslems do not even know IF the founder of their religion is buried. (According to their tradition, he ascended to Heaven before dying.)”

However, the truth is that it is not necessarily good to know where a person is buried. The Torah makes a point of telling us that we do not know and we will not know where Moshe is buried. The Talmud describes an attempt to locate the grave of Moshe Rabbeinu on Mount Nebo [Sotah 13b]. The attempt was foiled supernaturally. Why?

Rav Samson Rafael Hirsch explains that the Torah saw the potential that Moshe Rabbeinu’s grave could become a deity. It is important for all of us to remember that when we visit the graves of the righteous, we do not pray TO the righteous people that they should bless us. We are forbidden to pray TO a human being – dead or alive! We visit the graves of Tzadikim to ask that they petition on our behalf to the Ribono shel Olam. We are not allowed to daven TO the Tzadik.

The Torah saw the potential of such a thing happening with Moshe Rabbeinu. Moshe was a person of such monumental stature that the Torah feared lest his burial place would become a shrine.

The Torah is also informing us that as monumental a person as Moshe Rabbeinu was, there needed to be a new leader once he died. No one could fill his shoes, but that was irrelevant. Life must go on. The Torah stresses this idea by emphasizing, “You will come to the Judge who will be present IN THOSE DAYS” [Devorim 17:9] and “You will come to the Priest who will be present IN THOSE DAYS.” [Devorim 26:3]

The fact that this Judge or this Priest is not in the same league with his predecessor is irrelevant. We are told that Moshe’s face was like the sun and Yehoshua’s face was only like the moon. Yehoshua was not in the same league as Moshe. But Yehoshua was going to be the new leader.

Rabbi Wein always quotes the maxim: “No man is indispensable, yet no man is replaceable.” This is very true. No man is indispensable to the extent that “we cannot continue onward.” Yet no man is replaceable either. People have their own unique contributions that can never be replaced.

This is another explanation of why Moshe’s burial place is not known. The Jewish people had to move forward. They had to continue with the next leader and the next generation. “A generation passes on and a new generation comes.” [Koheles 1:4] We can only go to the leader who is present in our own generation. This is the way of the Torah and this is the way of the world.

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Rav Yochanan Zweig And Torah for All?

Hashem came from Sinai and He shone forth to them from Seir, He appeared from Mount Paran... (33:2)

The Midrash on this verse (Yalkut Shimoni ad loc, Sifrei 343), recounts a remarkable exchange between Hashem and the other nations of the world. Originally, Hashem sought to offer the Torah to all the nations of the world. In other words, before Hashem offered us the Torah, He actually offered it to all the other nations of the world. First, He approached the children of Eisav and asked them, “Do you wish to accept the Torah?” They replied, “What is written in it?” “Do not murder.” They said, “Our father [Eisav] was assured

[by his father, Yitzchak] that, ‘By your sword will you live! (Bereishis 27:40)’ we cannot accept the Torah.”

Next Hashem went to the children of Ammon and Moav and asked, “Do you wish to accept the Torah?” They asked, “What is written in it?” “Do not commit sexual immorality.” They responded, “Master of the Universe, our very existence is based on an immoral act!” (These two nations are descended from the daughters of Lot, who were impregnated by their father.) Thus they too, refused the offer.

Hashem then went to the children of Yishmael and asked them, “Do you wish to accept the Torah?” They asked, “What is written in it?” “Do not steal.” They responded, “Master of the Universe, the essence of our father was to be a bandit, as it is written, ‘And he will be a man of the wild; his hand will be in all...’” (Bereishis 16:12). Therefore they also refused. Eventually Hashem went to Bnei Yisroel who said “Na’aseh V’Nishma” and they alone accepted the Torah.

Yet, this Midrash presents us with a very difficult problem. All of the nations in the world are already commanded to keep the seven Noachide laws. The three prohibitions that Hashem presented these three nations are already included in the seven laws that all the nations of the world must adhere. In fact, the basic laws of social justice demand that for the good and continuity of civilization these behaviors are not tolerated. How could the nations refuse to accept the Torah because they didn’t agree to these laws? They are already committed to keeping them anyway!

In order to understand this Midrash we must ask a very basic question: Why did Hashem give them, as a litmus test for accepting the Torah, laws that they were already supposed to keep anyway? Wouldn’t it make more sense for Hashem to ask them if they would keep Shabbos or tzitzis? What message was Hashem conveying to them?

If we re-read the Midrash the answer becomes obvious. Hashem specifically approached each nation with a test of accepting the Torah with a law that runs counter to their specific nature. Why? Because this is the exact difference between the Torah and the seven Noachide laws. The seven Noachide laws are laws of good behavior. The Torah, on the other hand, is a guidebook to elevating and improving one’s self. The message that Hashem was relaying is that the real goal of the Torah isn’t to legislate behavior; the goal of the Torah is to work on yourself and change your very nature to become an elevated being. The Torah wants us to become God-like. This, of course, is much more than merely how we behave; the real test of whether or not we are keeping the Torah is: Are we becoming better people?

The nations of the world had no interest in this type of self growth. After all, the hardest thing to accomplish is the creation of lasting change in who we are. The other nations chose to remain as they were. They would try to behave, sometimes succeeding and often failing miserably. But they were prepared to deal with those consequences as long as they didn’t have to commit to any real personal growth. On the other hand, Bnei Yisroel, following in the footsteps of their forefathers, committed to working on improving their nature. That is what accepting the Torah really means.

It Takes All Types

There is a well-known Midrash (Vayikra Rabbah 30:12) that suggests that by binding the four species on Succos, which are also identified as the four different types of Jews, we are expressing a desire for communal unity in the service of Hashem and, in fact, this is precisely what Hashem is requesting of us.

The Midrash goes on to delineate the four types of Jews: The esrog, which possesses both taste and fragrance symbolizes those who possess both Torah learning and good deeds. The lulav (of the date palm) possess taste but no fragrance, symbolizing those who possess Torah learning but do not perform good deeds. The hadass is the inverse of the lulav; possessing no taste but having a pleasant fragrance; this is likened to those who are not learned but do focus on doing good deeds. Finally, the arava has neither taste nor fragrance; symbolizing those who possess neither learning nor good deeds. The Gemara in Shabbos (Bavli 105b) details the different occasions that one must rip his clothes, known as kriah, in mourning. One of the instances that one must perform kriah is if one is in the presence of a Jew who passes

away. Rashi (ad loc) explains why; “because there is no one among the Jewish people who doesn’t have both Torah and mitzvos (and this is similar to a Sefer Torah that is burnt – another instance that requires kriah).” This principle, as applied by Rashi, seems to contradict the Midrash regarding the arava minim, which stated that the arava represents the Jew with neither Torah nor mitzvos!

The answer is that both taste and smell are the resultant effects on another entity. In other words, there are many people who have Torah study but don’t really convey the proper taste of Torah when it comes to their interactions with other people. Likewise, there are many people that do good deeds but they don’t really convey the proper aroma of true chessed. Both of these types of people are inwardly focused; they may study because they find it intellectually stimulating or because it makes them feel holy, and they may do good deeds because it makes them feel altruistic or a sense of martyrdom. In truth, they have studied and they did do acts of kindness, so Rashi points out that it is important to mourn their passing. But in reality they are missing the key point of studying Torah and doing chessed – to achieve a healthy love of Torah and Hashem and to focus on becoming a compassionate person. When a person is able to achieve this he will instinctively convey the taste Torah and/or the pleasant aroma of mitzvos to others.

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subject: Rabbi Riskin on the Weekly Torah Portion

Shabbat Shalom: Simchat Torah By Rabbi Shlomo Riskin

Efrat, Israel – “And no human knows of [Moses’] burial place even to this day.” (Deut. 34:6)

Amid the great joy of Shemini Atzeret-Simchat Torah, emanating from the biblical commandment “and you shall thoroughly rejoice” (Deut. 16:15), a curious dialectic between celebration and solemnity nevertheless exists. This is palpable especially in Israel, when the dancing and festive readings from the end of Deuteronomy and beginning of Genesis are followed shortly thereafter by the recitation of the Yizkor memorial prayers.

Perhaps the duality of the day stems from the fact that we conclude Deuteronomy with the death of Moses, about whom the Bible testifies: “And there has not arisen a prophet again in Israel similar to Moses, whom the Lord knew face to face” (Deut. 34:10). From the perspective of Moses’ death, the fundamental joy of Simchat Torah appears somewhat of an anomaly. How can a day on which we read of this great loss also serve as one of the most festive days of the Jewish calendar year?

I believe the answer is to be found in the verse, “and no human knows of [Moses’] burial place even to this day” (Deut. 34:6). Many explain correctly that this has prevented the creation of a Mosaic shrine and a cult of Moses worship. I would like to add to this an additional understanding, based on the following vignette – which I heard from one of my mentors, Rabbi Moshe Besdin – that sheds profound light on the reason why the greatest of our prophets is denied a known gravesite.

A small impoverished town in Poland, with a limited number of Jewish families who were all very pious but ignorant of the holy texts, was in need of a rabbi. The parnass (community leader) was dispatched to the famous Volozhin Yeshiva to search for a candidate, but after being turned down by the most promising students, he became desperate. He finally approached a serious but other-worldly student with the bold request: “Come to be our town rabbi. We are a famous town: Rabbi Akiva, the Rambam and the Vilna Gaon are all buried in our community.” The student, adept at Talmud but ignorant of Jewish history, imagined that a town with a history of such illustrious scholarly leadership must still have at least a quorum of Torah scholars; He thanked God for his good fortune and immediately left with the parnass.

After a few weeks it became clear that no-one in town possessed even rudimentary Torah knowledge. The devastated young rabbi asked the parnass to take him to the cemetery. “At least I can contemplate your former glory at the gravesites of Rabbi Akiva, the Rambam, and Vilna Gaon!”

“You didn’t understand me,” responded the parnass. “In Volozhin, the students cited these great rabbis, and debated their legal arguments and discussions, as if they were walking among them. Rabbi Akiva argues, the Rambam decides, the Vilna Gaon rules. In your yeshiva, they are truly alive. In our town, no one has ever heard of what they wrote. In our town, they are dead and buried.”

When the Torah tells us that no one knows of the location of Moses’ gravesite, it is because for the Jewish people, Moses never died. We publicly read and privately contemplate his teachings on a daily basis. The greatest proof of his continuing presence in our lives is the fact that we conclude his Divine revelation only to immediately begin to read his words once again as we start the biblical cycle anew.

Therefore, on Simchat Torah, the day on which we read of Moses’ physical passing, we should wholeheartedly rejoice in the eternity of his teachings, emblemized by one of the signature songs of Simchat Torah: “Moshe emet, v’Torato emet!” – “Moses is truth, and his Torah is truth!”

We can similarly understand the seemingly incongruous tradition of reciting the memorial Yizkor prayers on festivals. But in fact, the practice perfectly captures the essence of the day. In those precious moments quietly reflecting on our deceased loved ones, we are offered a unique opportunity to consider the ways in which their qualities and love of Judaism continue to impact us. Indeed, there are few sources of more profound happiness than the realization that our loved ones live on through us, our children, and our descendants. They live on – and so are not gone and buried – just as Moshe Rabbenu lives on, and is not buried and covered over as long as we still read and learn his Torah!
Shabbat Shalom!

from: torahweb@torahweb.org

date: Oct 7, 2020, 12:08 PM

subject: new teshuva: Rav Schachter: The Timing of Birkas Kohanim, and Eating in the Sukkah, on Simchas Torah

[Regarding Hoshanos, because of social distancing, it may be preferable for the chazzan or Rabbi to circle around the shul by himself. The same could apply for Simchas Torah where we should minimize the number of people carrying Sifrei Torah. Dancing should be avoided lest people become lax about social distancing. If there is a concern regarding the length of davening on the day when Koheles is being read, then Koheles may be omitted this year or read later in the day at Mincha, after laining.]

The custom of many communities is to recite Birkas Kohanim during Shacharis of Simchas Torah instead of during Mussaf. If the shul is not having a kiddush before Mussaf on Simchas Torah, then the Kohanim should recite Birkas Kohanim during Mussaf rather than at Shacharis.

One may not eat in a Sukkah on Simchas Torah because doing so would be a violation of Bal Tosif, inappropriately adding on to the mitzvos. If for health reasons a family would like to eat outside on Simchas Torah but the only available area is in the Sukkah, they should either place a covering over the Sukkah or have a non-Jew remove the Sechach so that the Sukkah is no longer kosher.