

**Wembley Synagogue**

וְזֵאת הַבְּרָכָה

Insights from the commentators into the Sidra of Vezot Haberacha

וְזֵאת הַבְּרָכָה אֲשֶׁר בֵּרַךְ מֹשֶׁה - And this is the blessing that Moshe the Man of G-d blessed the Children of Israel before his death.(33:1) This is the only place in the Torah where Moshe is referred to as "the Man of G-d." Why is this title conferred upon Moshe specifically just before his death? The fact that Moshe reached a higher level of prophecy than any other prophet - before or after him - is a fundamental tenet of Judaism. It is for this reason that no prophet can ever contradict Moshe's teachings. It is therefore vital that the Torah emphasises Moshe's status - by calling him "the Man of G-d." However, Moshe in his great humility did not wish such a title to be bestowed upon him. Hashem honoured his wishes and gave him this title until just before his death, the last available opportunity. (Source: Admor MiGur - Ma'ayana shel Torah)

אֶת בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל - Upon the Children of Israel (33:1) The Rabbis teach that on the day of his passing, Moshe was shown all the future generations down to the last Jew. When Moshe blessed the nation, he blessed every Jew in every future generation. That is why every Jew is called to the Torah on Simchat Torah. Since Moshe blessed us all, we all go up to the Torah to receive our share of his blessings (Source: Yechahain Pe'er quoted in The Torah Treasury)

It is customary for every male to be called to the Torah on Simchat Torah. This is based on the Aggadic statement that the word *Israel* - *Israel* is an acronym for the words *יש ששים רבוא אותיות לתורה* - there are 600,000 letters in the Torah - one corresponding to each of the 600,000 primary souls of the Jewish people. In the course of the year, we become ensnared in sin, but over the course of the spiritually redeeming days of Tishri, we uplift ourselves and strengthen our attachment to the Torah. Thus it is fitting on this last day of the festival that each man be honoured with an aliyah (literally, rising) to the Torah (Source: Meor Einayim)

תּוֹרַה צְנָה לְנוּ מֹשֶׁה -The Torah that Moshe commanded us is the heritage of the Congregation of Yaakov. (33:4) How can we reconcile our *pasuk* with Rabbi Yosi's statement *Avot 2:12* "Prepare yourselves for the study of Torah *'she'einah yerushah lach'* - for it does not come to you through inheritance"? Torah is indeed the inheritance of the Jewish community at large; however, this does not apply to the individual. He cannot rely on the Torah's inherited dimension, but must study diligently and make every effort to acquire Torah knowledge. The *Gemara Berachot 57a* says, "Read not *'morashah'* - 'inheritance' - but *'me'orasah'* - 'betrothed,' " - meaning that the Jewish people and the Torah are betrothed to each other like a bride and groom. What was the intent of the sages in changing the word? A *chatan* and *kallah* during the period of *eirusin* - betrothal - experience a high degree of love. It is for this reason that when King Shlomo in Song of Songs portrays the Hashem's love for the Jewish people, he describes it as the love between a *chatan* and *kallah* anticipating their marriage. Perhaps our sages were puzzled by the contradiction between our *pasuk* and the statement in *Pirkei Avot*. Therefore, they said, "Read not *'morashah'* - 'inheritance' - because Torah is not an inheritance. Read *'me'orasah'* - 'betrothed' " - and the Torah is telling us that the inherent infinite love that each and every Jew has for Torah motivating him to be ready to give his life for it, is a quality which is an inheritance of the Jewish people and instilled in the heart of every Jew. (Source: Vedibarta Bam)

וַיָּמָת שָׁם מֹשֶׁה עֶבֶד ה' - So Moshe, servant of Hashem, died there, in the land of Moav, by the mouth of Hashem (34:5) The Gemara Bava Batra 17a relates that Moshe's body did not decay. This phenomenon can better be understood in the light of the fact that the Gemara states that Hashem personally took Moshe's soul and not the Angel of Death. According to the Gemara Avoda Zara 20b when the Angel of Death kills a person a drop of *'marah'* is injected into the person causing the decay of the body. (Source: Shabbos Delights)

וְלֹא יָדַע אִישׁ אֶת קְבֻרָתוֹ עַד הַיּוֹם הַזֶּה -And no man knew his (Moshe's) burial place even until this very day. (34:6) It is remarkable that the Torah makes a statement that does not seem to offer any information. If the Torah is not offering any information regarding the whereabouts of Moshe's burial, why does it discuss the matter at all? The Torah makes an important point by mentioning the fact that the burial place of Moshe remains forever unknown. Moshe transcribed the Divine words of the Torah - even the account of his own death. He did not change one iota of the Divine meaning. This is apparent from account of his own death. Had he wished to tamper with the Torah for his own interests, he surely would

have glorified his own end. He could have said that he ascended to heaven while still alive - a claim not unfeasible for a man with the supernatural powers of Moshe. And, as this verse indicates, he had the opportunity to make such a claim because no one was able to point to his body and prove that he had actually died - "no man knew his burial place." Thus, although this verse does not provide any information about Moshe's burial site, it teaches an important lesson. Even when Moshe had a motive and an opportunity to change details of the Torah, he did not do so. He transcribed the Divine words 100% faithfully. (Source: Kohelet Yitzchok - Ma'ayanah Shel Torah)

The Midrash (Sifri) states that there is an opinion that Moshe himself did not know where he was to be buried. The language implies that this is a singular opinion and is not accepted by everyone. We also find a dispute as to who buried Moshe. One opinion is that he buried himself (Sifri, Naso 32); the other opinion is that Hashem buried Moshe (Gemara Sota 9b). It can be suggested that the two disputes are related. The view that holds that Moshe himself did not know where he was buried holds that Hashem buried him, whereas the other view holds that since Moshe was aware of his burial spot he buried himself. (Source: R' Yitzchak Zev Soloveitchik quoted by Shai LaTorah[revised])

וְלֹא יִבְרָא עוֹד בְּיִשְׂרָאֵל כְּמֹשֶׁה - Never again has there arisen in Israel a prophet like Moshe. (34:10) It should have said, "*velo yakum*" — "there will not arise" — in future tense. The uniqueness of Moshe's form of prophecy was that while all the other prophets received their revelations while dreaming and lying down, Moshe would be standing upright and alert while Hashem conversed with him (see Rambam, *Yesodei Hatorah* 7:6). With the word "*kam*" which literally means "standing," the Torah is saying, "There never again will be a prophet in Israel who will receive a prophecy while '*kam*' — 'standing'" — similar to the way Moshe received his revelations. (Source: Peninim on the Torah)

וּבְכָל הַיָּד הַחֲזָקָה וּלְכָל הַמְּוֹנָא הַגְּדוֹל - And by all the strong hand and awesome power that Moshe performed before the eyes of all Israel. (34:12) On *Simchat Torah*, as soon as we conclude the reading of *Devarim*, we immediately start over from *Bereshit*, to demonstrate that Torah is like a circle; it has no end and no beginning. The final letter of the Torah is a *lamed*, and the opening letter is a *bet*, which together spell the word "*leiv*" — "heart." This alludes to what our sages say (*Sanhedrin* 106b), "Hashem desires the heart" i.e., righteousness, as it is written, "Hashem sees into the heart" (I Samuel 16:7) The message implied is that Hashem does not judge people merely by the extent of their Torah scholarship, but rather by the righteousness and devotion to Him that is in their heart. Alternatively, Rashi explains that what Moshe performed "before the eyes of all of Israel" was the shattering of the Tablets, and Hashem approved His decision. The *Gemara Avodah Zarah* 3a says that at the time of creation, Hashem made a condition that, "If the Jews will accept My Torah, it is good; otherwise, I will return you all to '*tohu vavohu*' — 'unformed and void.' "If so, why did Moshe shatter the Tablets and not worry that it would cause the destruction of the world? The *Gemara* there says that heaven and earth cannot be witness that the Jews observe the Torah because they have a vested interest, as the *pasuk* says, "Were it not for My covenant (Torah) day and night, I would not have appointed the ordinances of heaven and earth" (Jeremiah 33:25). *Tosafot* asks, "But why isn't the mere fact of their existence proof that the Jews observe Torah?" *Tosafot* answers, that heaven and earth exist in the merit of the Jews' *consent to accept* Torah, as is indicated by Hashem's condition that their existence is contingent "*im Yisrael mekablīm et Torati*" — "if the Jews accept My Torah" — without saying "observe" or "study."

According to the *Ba'al Haturim*, the word "*Bereshit*" is an acronym for *ba'rishonah ra'ah Elokim sheYisrael y'kablu Torah* — "In the beginning G-d saw that the Jews would accept the Torah." Consequently, when Moshe shattered the Tablets "*le'einei kol Yisrael*" — "before the eyes of the entire community" — he was not concerned that this would affect the existence of the world because "*Bereshit*" — it will remain in existence in merit of the Jews' original consent to accept the Torah at the time it was offered to them.

חג שמח!

Chag Sameach

The *Insights into the Sedra* sheet is produced by Chazan Anthony Wolfson
Online at: http://www.wembleysynagogue.org/html/sedra_notes.html

חזק חזק ונתחזק!