



Parshas Vzoz HaBracha

For 24 October 1997/22 Tishrei 5758 in Israel
25 October 1997/23 Tishrei 5758 Outside Israel

Overview

The Torah draws to its close with *V'zos Habracha*, which is the only Parsha in the Torah not read specifically on a Shabbos. Rather, *V'zos Habracha* is read on *Shmini Atzeres/Simchas Torah*, when everyone in the synagogue gets called up to the Torah for an *aliyah* – even boys who are not yet Bar Mitzvah. The Parsha is repeated until everyone has received an *aliyah*.

Moshe continues the tradition of Yaakov by blessing the Tribes of Yisrael before his death. Similar to the blessings bestowed by Yaakov, these blessings are also a combination of the description of each Tribe's essence, together with a definition of its role within the nation of Israel. The only Tribe that does not receive a blessing is Shimon, because they were central to the mass immorality of worshipping the idol *ba'al pe'or*. Another explanation is that this Tribe's population was small and scattered throughout the south of the Land of Israel, and would therefore receive blessings together with the host Tribe amongst whom they would live; i.e., Yehuda. Moshe's last words to his beloved people are of reassurance that Hashem will more than recompense His people for all of the suffering they will endure. Moshe ascends the mountain and Hashem shows him prophetically all that will happen to *Eretz Yisrael* in the future, both in tranquillity and in times of oppression. Hashem also shows him all that will happen to the Jewish People until the time of the Resurrection. Moshe dies there by means of the "Divine Kiss." To this day, no one knows the place of his burial, in order that his grave should not become a shrine for those who wish to make a prophet into a god. Of all the prophets, Moshe was unique in his being able to speak to Hashem whenever he wanted. His centrality and stature are not a product of the Jewish People's "blind faith," but are based on events that were witnessed by an entire nation – at the Red Sea, at Mount Sinai and constantly during 40 years of journeying through the desert.

Insights

WHAT GOES AROUND

"And this is the blessing that Moshe, the man of G-d, blessed the children of Yisrael." (33:1)

The perfect circle. Complete. The circle unites the beginning and the end. There is no beginning nor end to a circle. If you take one point and call it its beginning, when you get to the end you will find yourself back where you started.

On *Simchas Torah*, we finish reading the Torah and immediately start again from the beginning.

In our joy at having completed the Torah, we dance with it in a circle. Specifically in a circle. The Torah is endless. When we reach its end, we are already back at its beginning.

The final words of the Torah are: "*in the eyes of all Yisrael.*" And its first words: "*In the beginning.*" The circle dance of *Simchas Torah* joins the end to the beginning, that "*the eyes of all Yisrael*" should be fixed on the "*beginning.*"

A BRICK OF SAPPHIRE - A PLANK OF WOOD

Dear Journal,

Something very strange happened to me yesterday.

Yesterday was *Simchas Torah*. Somehow, I found myself celebrating the festival in a remarkably unremarkable Israeli town.

Graying stucco peeling from grayer concrete testify that this town isn't going to be another little New York, another Tel Aviv.

Anyway, yesterday I made my way to the town's municipal synagogue for *Simchas Torah*. There weren't a lot of people there. It's not a religious town. In fact the majority of those who *were* there were in their seventies and eighties. Most of them had all come to Israel after the war. Most of them had been in the camps.

Continued on the reverse

Prepared by Ohr Somayach in Jerusalem, Israel

©1997 Ohr Somayach International - All rights reserved.

22 Shimon Hatzadik Street, POB 18103, Jerusalem Israel

38 East 29th Street 8th floor, New York, NY 10016, USA

613 Clark Avenue West, Thornhill, Ontario L4J 5V3, Canada

972-2-581-0315

1-212-213-3100

1-905-886-5730

972-2-581-2890

1-212-213-8717

1-905-886-6065

ohr@virtual.co.il

RZCorlin@aol.com or estern@Aol.com

Somayach@MSN.com

Written and Compiled by Rabbi Yaakov Asher Sinclair

General Editor: Rabbi Moshe Newman

Dedication opportunities are available for Torah Weekly — Please contact us for details.

Parshas *Vzoz HaBracha* — 24 October 1997/22 Tishrei 5758 in Israel, 25 October 1997/23 Tishrei 5758 Outside Israel

Production Design: Lev Seltzer

Continued from the front

The reason I'm writing all this is because something very strange happened there. They were all dancing around with their Torah scrolls, just like a normal *Simchas Torah*, singing and dancing and making a lot of noise. People making "*lechaim*." Then all of a sudden, the singing and dancing stopped. A hush fell over the shul.

One of the old men went behind the Holy Ark. He brought out a wooden plank about a meter and a half long and put it on the floor in the middle of the Beis Kenesses. Slowly, as though summoned to some atavistic rite, all the older members of the shul handed their Torah scrolls to the youngsters, and silently began to circle the plank on the floor. Round and round they went, round and round. In total silence.

It was all over in a couple of minutes. As perfunctorily as it had started, so it ended. The shul returned to a typical *Simchas Torah* scene just as though nothing had happened. Children on the shoulders of their fathers waving flags, singing and dancing.

As the man who had brought out the plank emerged from the back of the holy Ark after putting it away, I asked him about what I had just witnessed.

This is what he said to me:

"During the war, we were all in the same camp. By a miracle, someone managed to smuggle in a *Sefer Torah*. It was just before *Simchas Torah*. We were very frightened, maybe the Germans, *yemach shemam*, would find it. So we pulled up the wooden floor and hid it under the floorboards.

"When *Simchas Torah* came, the Germans were everywhere; they must have known something was up. There was no way we could risk taking out the Torah from its hiding place, and we were afraid that the guard would hear us if we made a noise. So we just walked around and around the place on the floor under which the Torah was hidden. They came in once. We just pretended we were going to our bunks or out the door till they left and then we carried on circling.

"So now, every year, we celebrate that *Simchas Torah* in the camps the way you just saw."

At the end of Parshas Mishpatim, the Torah describes a brick of Sapphire. "Moshe, Aaron, Nadav and Avihu and seventy of the elders of Israel ascended. They saw the G-d of Israel, and under His feet was the likeness of a brick of sapphire, and its purity was like the essence of the heavens."

All the time that the Jewish People were slaves, this brick was before Hashem. This brick was a memorial to their

suffering when they built the treasure cities of Egypt with bricks of mortar.

The "*essence of heavens*" refers to the light and joy before Hashem when they were redeemed.

Whenever the Torah describes the attributes of Hashem, it is so we may strive to emulate them.

Even when "*the essence of the heavens*" was revealed — even in the light and joy of redemption — "*the brick of sapphire*," of suffering, was still there too.

By reminding ourselves of our suffering at the height of our joy, we experience an entirely new dimension in our rejoicing. Through this, we can understand on a deeper level the good that the Almighty bestows upon us, and thank Him with a full heart that He has brought us again to the great *simcha* of completing the reading of His holy Torah.

SPENDING AND SAVING

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

There is a great difference between an *inheritance* and a *heritage*.

An inheritance is the sole possession of the one who inherits it. It is his to do with as he pleases: To consume, to invest or to squander. However, a heritage must be cherished and preserved and passed on intact to the next generation.

The Torah is our heritage — *not* our inheritance. We must pass it on to the next generation as we found it, and not abridged, altered or adulterated.

SEEING AND BELIEVING

"...before the eyes of all Yisrael." (34:12)

These are the final words of the Torah. The entire Jewish People were witnesses to all the miracles that were wrought through Moshe Rabbeinu. With their own eyes they saw, and "seeing is believing."

In other words, their *believing* came from *seeing*: their faith in Moshe came from daily contact with miracles.

These miracles were witnessed not by a small group who then convinced others through charisma or coercion. Rather, the entire nation — *the eyes of all Yisrael* — were witnesses to the miracles. They *all* saw the dividing of the Red Sea, the Voice at Sinai, and the manna.

Manna was the miraculous food that the Jewish People ate every day for forty years. Forty years, day-in day-out. They saw it with enough regularity for it to have become mundane.

This was the seeing that founded the rock-like faithfulness of the Jewish People throughout the long night of exile. With their own eyes they saw that Moshe, the prophet of Hashem, was authentic, and his Torah, the Torah of the Living G-d, was Truth.

Haftorah - Shmini Atzeres/Simchas Torah: Yehoshua 1:1

Immediately when we finish reading the Torah, we start again "In the beginning of God's creating the heavens and the earth..." In this way we remind ourselves that immersing ourselves in the truths of the Torah is an eternal task, without beginning or end. The Haftorah states "And Hashem spoke to Yehoshua bin Nun, Moshe's lieutenant, saying 'Moshe my servant is dead. You arise and cross over the Jordan...'" to remind us that the work of the Torah is not that of a human being, not even the highest, but it is Hashem's work that began with the revelation at Sinai, and its accomplishment is not dependent on the personality and life of any man, however great and sublime he may be.

Sources:

What Goes Around - adapted from Rabbi Shlomo Yosef Zevin

A Brick of Sapphire - A Plank of Wood - Rashi;

Rabbi Yerucham Levovitz; Zale Newman; Moshe Averick

Spending And Saving - Rabbi Nachman Bulman

Seeing And Believing - Ohr HaChaim HaKadosh

Haftorah: Adapted from Dr. Mendel Hirsch, based on the words of his father, Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch

Parshas Vzos HaBracha

For the week ending 24 October 1997/22 Tishrei 5758 in Israel, 25 October 1997/23 Tishrei 5758 Outside Israel

Torah Weekly is available from several sources:

- World Wide Web: Our address is <http://www.ohr.org.il>
- Fax and Mail in Israel and US-MAIL in America . Send us a note requesting a subscription in Israel, or call 800-431-2272 in the US for details.
- E-Mail via InterNet. To subscribe, send the message "sub weekly {your full name}" to listproc@virtual.co.il

This publication contains words of Torah. Please treat it with due respect. Do not let this land on a garbage heap.