



Parshat V'zot Haberacha

For 2 October 1999/22 Tishrei 5760 in Israel
3 October 1999/23 Tishrei 5760 Outside Israel

Overview

The Torah draws to its close with *V'zot Haberacha*, which is the only Parsha in the Torah not read specifically on a Shabbat. Rather, *V'zot Haberacha* is read on *Shmini Atzeret/Simchat 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

BURIED TREASURE

"So Moshe, servant of Hashem, died there, in the land of Moav, opposite Bet Peor, and no one knows his burial place to this day." (31:4)

Many years ago, there was a small Jewish community somewhere in Poland which had very little to recommend it. Its people were not scholars nor interested in being so.

It was a backwater of a backwater. Nothing ever happened there, nor was likely to. It happened that the position of rabbi fell vacant in this town. The president of the synagogue advertised in the newspaper in Lublin "dynamic rabbi needed for important town." Not long afterwards, a young enthusiastic rabbi who had just received his *semicha* (rabbinical ordination) came for an interview. After looking around the town he was rather disappointed. He mentioned to the president that it didn't seem that much could be done in this town. Nobody seemed to be interested in studying the Torah. He implied that this wasn't really a very important town. The president said to him "What do you mean, this isn't an important town? Do you realize who is buried here?"

"No. Who?"

"The Rambam is buried in this town! Rashi is buried in this town!"

When faced with the possibility of having such illustrious antecedents, the rabbi started to look at the position in a new light. "Okay." He said. "I'll take it."

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Some months later, the rabbi was passing by the town's graveyard. On the spot, he decided to pay a visit to the graves of the Rambam and Rashi. The graveyard was not a big place. After half an hour of searching, he was convinced neither the Rambam nor Rashi were present amongst those who rested there. And then he thought to himself "Hang on a minute! The Rambam is buried in Teveria in *Eretz Yisrael!* Rashi's buried somewhere in France!"

Livid, he demanded to see the president of the synagogue. "You lied to me!" he said, his face quivering from betrayal. "You said that the Rambam is buried in this town; that Rashi is buried in this town. That's not true! The Rambam is buried in Teveria." "No, he isn't." replied the president calmly. "He's buried here." "But that's simply *not true!*" replied the rabbi.

The president explained himself. "The

Rambam isn't buried in Teveria, because in Teveria everyone studies him. The Rambam is buried in *this* town because here nobody learns him. Rashi is buried in *this* town because here nobody learns him. I was hoping that you could 'resurrect' them."

"So Moshe, servant of Hashem, died there, in the land of Moav, opposite Bet Peor, and no one knows his burial place to this day."

If the Torah specifies that Moshe died "there in the land of Moav, opposite Bet Peor," how can it immediately say that "no one knows his burial place?"

The righteous are "alive" even when they are dead. It's true that Moshe's body died "in the land of Moav opposite Bet Peor." However, "no one knows his burial place" because everywhere that Jews study Torah, Moshe is alive and well in the land of the living.

Haftarah: 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 Haftarah 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.

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