

# DIMENSIONS IN CHUMASH

## PARSHAS V'ZOS HABERACHAH

### Moshe's Blessings

וְזֹאת הַבְּרָכָה אֲשֶׁר בֵּרַךְ מֹשֶׁה אִישׁ הָאֱלֹקִים אֶת בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל

*And this is the blessing that Moshe, the man of God, blessed the Children of Israel.<sup>1</sup>*

#### INTRODUCTION:

#### FOUR INTRODUCTIONS – FOR BLESSINGS THAT NEED NO INTRODUCTION!

Most of us are very familiar with the opening verses of V'zos Haberachah. Indeed, after typically hearing them read several times in shul on Simchas Torah, we could probably recite them by heart. Yet our very familiarity may preclude us from asking a very simple question regarding these verses: Verse one seemingly introduces the blessings that Moshe gave to the people, but we don't actually hear any of them until verse 6! In between, the parsha appears to digress toward other themes: "*Hashem came from Sinai... Moshe commanded us the Torah... Hashem was King among Yeshurun etc.*" Important ideas, to be sure, but what are they doing wedged between the introduction of the blessings and the blessings themselves? By way of comparison, let us remind ourselves that in the beginning of Parshas Noach, when the opening verse introduces Noach's progeny, and then they are not mentioned until the following verse, Rashi responds to this and offers two separate approaches to explain the delay. What about our parsha?

It is clear that, somehow, these intervening verses also serve as part of the introduction to the blessings. The question is: how?

#### IN THE MIDRASH: FROM YAAKOV TO MOSHE

In order to answer the above question, let us raise an additional even more disarming question: Why was Moshe blessing the people as tribes at all? As we know, this was something that was already done by Yaakov. Presumably, Yaakov had already identified and bestowed the appropriate blessing for each of his sons. What, then, was there left for Moshe to add?

The Midrash provides a stunning answer to this question. After Yaakov finished blessing his sons, the verse says, "וְזֹאת אֲשֶׁר דִּבֶּר לָהֶם אָבִיהֶם וַיְבָרֶךְ אוֹתָם" – *And this is what their father spoke to them and he blessed them.*<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Devarim 33:1.

<sup>2</sup> Bereishis 49:28.

Commenting on these words, the Midrash Tanchuma<sup>3</sup> says:

**”וזאת” : עתיד נביא לברך אתכם כיוצא בו. במקום שפסקתי אני – הוא יברך אתכם, וכן עשה משה שנאמר ”וזאת הרבכה אשר ברך משה.”**

*“V’zos”:* [Yaakov said to his sons,] “In the future, a prophet will bless you similarly. In the place where I stopped, he will [commence to] bless, as it says, ‘And this (V’zos) is the blessing that Moshe blessed.’”

It emerges that Moshe’s blessings were in fact a *continuation* and *completion* of Yaakov’s blessings – he began where Yaakov left off!

Yet we may still persist and ask: Why was it necessary for Moshe to complete the blessing that Yaakov began? Why could Yaakov not give the blessing in its entirety?

The answer to this question, too, is provided by the Midrash. We have seen that the “watchword” for the transition from Yaakov’s blessing to those of Moshe is “V’zos”. The Midrash further elucidates the significance of this word:

**אמר להם, אומר אני לכם אימתי מגיעות לכם הברכות האלו, משעה שתקבלו את התורה, שנאמר ”וזאת התורה אשר שם משה לפני בני ישראל.”**

*[Yaakov] said to [his sons]: “I will tell you when these [future] blessings will be given to you, from the time that you receive the Torah, as it says, ‘And this (V’zos) is the Torah that Moshe placed before the Children of Israel’”*<sup>4</sup>

We see that the entity that allowed for Moshe to complete Yaakov’s blessings is the Torah that we received in the interim.

## CASES IN POINT: THE BLESSINGS OF REUVEN AND YEHUDA

A very clear illustration of this progression can be seen in the first two of Moshe’s blessings – to Reuven and Yehuda. The blessings of these two tribes are very closely related to episodes where their patriarchs erred – Reuven with Bilhah and Yehuda with Tamar.

- ▷ In Yaakov’s blessing to Reuven, there is only criticism for his mistake, with the “blessing” being for him to take to heart the tendencies that led him to err on that occasion and to take care to avoid any such situations in the future.
- ▷ Even Yehuda, who was praised by Yaakov for admitting his mistake and awarded the institution of kingship, there is no mention of actual atonement for his sin.

It is only when Moshe blesses these two tribes that he says, “יְחִי רְאוּבֵן – *let Reuven live*,”<sup>5</sup> which means let him receive atonement for his sin,<sup>6</sup> and then “וזאת ליהודה – *And this [atonement] should [also] be for*

3 Sec. 16.

4 Devarim 4:44.

5 Verse 6.

6 Sifrei sec. 347, cited in Rashi Devarim ibid.

Yehuda.”<sup>7</sup> The basis that enabled this development was the giving of the Torah which, the Gemara<sup>8</sup> informs us, can achieve atonement for a person where other means prove insufficient.

## YISSACHAR AND ZEVULUN – ACTIVATING THE RELATIONSHIP

In both Yaakov and Moshe's blessings, the blessings to Zevulun and Yissachar are mentioned one after the other. However, there is one difference:

- In Yaakov's **blessings, the two tribes are mentioned in two consecutive verses.**<sup>9</sup>
- **In Moshe's blessings, they are mentioned in the same verse.**<sup>10</sup>

What is behind this difference?

Rashi informs us that the relationship between these two tribes is that Zevulun engaged in commerce, thereby support Yissachar who were Torah scholars. As such, at the time when Yaakov gave his blessings, which was before the Torah had been given, there was not yet an actual basis for this relationship to be implemented. Therefore Yaakov placed them in position, but they were not actually connected at that time. With the Torah having been given in Moshe's time, their relationship could be actualized, and hence Moshe's blessing placed them both in the same verse, working together.

## TORAH: THE ULTIMATE UNIFIER

An additional development that follows the giving of the Torah is expressed in the final introductory verse:<sup>11</sup>

וַיְהִי בִישׁוּרוֹן מֶלֶךְ בְּהַתְּאַסֵּף רָאשֵׁי עַם יִחַד שְׂבָטֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל

*And there was a King in Yeshurun, when all the heads of the nation assembled, together the tribes of Israel.*

As the verse indicates, Hashem's presence among His people as their King is made possible by their coming together as one people; and that unity is enabled by the giving of the Torah. Each tribe has its distinct character, and without a common system of Jewish living for the entire nation, they could easily become twelve separate nations. Additionally, although certain institutions pertain only to specific tribes, so that monarchy can only come from Yehuda, and priesthood from Levi, the level of Torah scholar is available to all, regardless of whatever particular tribe they come from. In this sense, too, the Torah allows for greater blessing, as the unity it promotes among the Jewish people brings Hashem closer to them as their King, which is the ultimate source of blessing!

7 Verse 7, Rashi ibid., citing the Gemara in Makkos 11b.

8 Rosh Hashanah 18a.

9 Bereishis 49:13-14.

10 Devarim 33:18.

11 Verse 5.

## BETWEEN PESUCHOS AND SETUMOS – TWO TYPES OF TORAH PARAGRAPH

A fascinating insight into the unifying effect of the Torah is presented by R' Leib Heyman.<sup>12</sup> By way of preface, we know that the concept of a “parsha” as it relates to a sefer Torah refers to the paragraphs into which the sections are broken up. There are two types of paragraph breaks:

- ▷ *Pesuchah* – An “open” break, where the rest of the line where the first paragraph ends is left blank, and the following paragraph begins on the next line.<sup>13</sup>
- ▷ *Setumah* – A “closed” break, where a space is left after the first paragraph, and then the second paragraph begins at the end of the same line.<sup>14</sup>

There is room to ponder a very simple question: Is there any difference between these two types of paragraph?

This is a question we could very easily never ask, yet as soon as we do, we can anticipate the answer that is forthcoming. R' Heyman explains that indeed there is a difference, and moreover, it can be perceived from the layout of the paragraphs themselves:

- ▷ A *pesuchah* paragraph is essentially detached from the one that preceded it, hence it starts on an entirely new line.
- ▷ A *setumah* paragraph, while representing something new, is also somewhat connected to the one that preceded it, therefore, it starts on the same line on which the first one finished.

With this in mind, let us see which paragraph breaks appear in the blessings of Yaakov and those of Moshe.

- ▷ In Yaakov's blessings – the tribes from Rachel and Leah are divided from each other by *pesuchah* breaks, while the tribes from Bilhah and Zilpah are divided using *setumah* breaks.
- ▷ In Moshe's blessings – all the tribes are divided from each other using *setumah* breaks.

Initially, there was something of a difference in status between the sons of Rachel and Leah – Lavan's actual daughters – on the one hand, and those of Bilhah and Zilpah – their handmaidens – on the other.<sup>15</sup> This differentiation is reflected in Yaakov's Berachos, whereby the sons of Rachel and Leah are divided using *pesuchos*, denoting their status as significant entities, while the sons of Bilhah and Zilpah, who did not enjoy that status, are all divided with *setumos*, linking them back to the sons of Rachel and Leah.<sup>16</sup> With the giving of the Torah, however, these boundaries were nullified, for an outstanding national Torah luminary can come just as easily from the sons of Bilhah and Zilpah as he can from those of Rachel and Leah. The equality that the Torah introduced is reflected in the fact that in Moshe's blessings, all of the

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12 Chikrei Lev, Parshas Vayechi maamar 38, and Chayei Leivav, Parshas v'Zos Haberachah maamar 142.

13 This paragraph break is indicated in our chumashim by the letter *peh*.

14 This paragraph break is indicated in our chumashim by the letter *samech*.

15 See Rashi Bereishis 37:2 s.v. *es bnei*.

16 There is one exception and that is Yosef, who is linked to the sons of Bilhah and Zilpah with a *setumah* break. Rav Heyman explains that this reflects the fact that Yosef would keep company with those brothers and encourage them, as cited by Rashi to Bereishis ibid.

brothers are connected with *setumos*, with none able to claim more significance based on lineage alone.<sup>17</sup>

An incredible message from the Torah's layout of the two sets of blessings!

This discussion can serve to give us further insight into the reading of Parshas v'Zos Haberachah on the day of Simchas Torah. Not only is it the final parsha of the Torah, but it also expresses the idea that the Torah is the basis for achieving higher forms of blessing. This was reflected in Moshe's blessings in his generation, and remains true for all Jews in all generations.

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<sup>17</sup> Here, too, there is one exception. Even in Moshe's blessings, Yehudah and Levi are divided by a *pesuchah* break. Rav Heyman explains that this total separation reflects the ideas the institutions that are the domain of those tribes – kingship and priesthood respectively – should not be merged and neither tribe should attempt to appropriate the office of the other.

