

SIDRA OF THE WEEK : וזאת הברכה

1. After the strong words of rebuke and warning which are the principal themes of the previous Sidra, Mosheh our Teacher now bestows his blessing upon the Jewish People. Ever the dedicated servant of the people and the trusted emissary of G-d in Whose Name he speaks, rather than spend his last hours on earth to be with his family and his own children, Mosheh utilizes this precious time to speak to his people and to bless them.
2. By way of introduction, Mosheh recalls how it was the Jewish People who trustingly and unquestioningly accepted the Torah from HaShem and how together with the Torah they accepted also their mission to bring all humanity to acknowledge the Sovereignty of HaShem as the Father and Ruler of all Mankind.
3. Thus, says Mosheh, although it is true that all humankind is dear to HaShem, nevertheless it is the Jewish People that is especially precious to HaShem for they it is who make known the word of G-d to all and who will for all time proclaim HaShem as the Sovereign and Ruler of the world. In the merit of this unique relationship with HaShem, Mosheh prays, may HaShem bestow His blessing upon the individual Tribes of Israel, united in their divine mission to the world.
4. In his blessings to the Tribes of Israel, Mosheh our Teacher looks back to the beginnings of our history as a people and refers also to prophetic glimpses of things yet to happen because the character and destiny of each of the Tribes are shaped and influenced by this unique combination of past and future. Thus the future of the Jewish People is intricately bound up with its past and so long as they follow the path of their founding fathers they can look forward to everything good.
5. First of all, Mosheh blesses the Tribe of Reuven, the firstborn son of Yaakov. Their sense of responsibility is demonstrated in their courageous undertaking to go ahead and fight at the side of their brother tribes in taking possession of the Land. In fact, this quality of standing up for his brothers first showed itself when their founding father, Reuven, attempted to save Yosef and return him safely to Yaakov his father (See **SIDRA OF THE WEEK : וישב**) and again when he offered to guarantee to Yaakov the safe return of his brother Binyomin (see **SIDRA OF THE WEEK : מקץ**). Mosheh acknowledges this quality in the people of the Tribe of Reuven and he prays that they should not suffer any losses through their undertakings on behalf of the Jewish People and that they should be blessed with success and longevity —
6. and, prays Mosheh, the same should apply also for the Tribe of Yehudah — and for the same reason. Yehudah, the founding father of this Tribe, too, stood ready to defend his brothers and was willing even to give his life for his brother Binyomin (see **SIDRA OF THE WEEK : ויגש**). As the leader Tribe of the Jewish People from whom the Jewish royal family shall come, they too deserve and need HaShem's blessing and help.

7. Concerning the Tribe of Levi, Mosheh recalls how they were the only Tribe which in its entirety remained loyal to HaShem when the Jewish People panicked and slipped in the episode of the Golden Calf. The Tribe of Levi, says Mosheh, is truly deserving of the trust that HaShem has placed in them to be His representatives to the Jewish People and, in the person of the Kohanim who are part of the Tribe of Levi, the representatives of the Jewish People in the Mikdash of HaShem. They have shown unflinching loyalty and great self-sacrifice to HaShem and, even if they have, in the past, been perhaps too ferocious in their loyalty, nevertheless this quality will stand them in good stead in their appointed task as guardians of the Torah and Torah teachers of the Jewish People. Even when it appears that, for reasons known only to Him, HaShem appears not to listen to their entreaties (Mosheh, himself a Levite, was here obliquely referring to himself and HaShem's refusal to grant his dearest wish that he be allowed to come into the Promised Land) nevertheless the people of this Tribe carry out their duties without question. Therefore, prays Mosheh, because of this Tribe's proven faithfulness, may HaShem always be Levi's support and help them to overcome the enemies of the Jewish People with whom they might have to do battle.
8. Following on from the blessing of the Tribe of Levi, the guardians of the Sanctuary which is the Beis HaMikdash, Mosheh next turns to the Tribe of Binyomin, in whose territory that Beis HaMikdash will eventually be situated. In the merit of this worthiness of Binyomin and the holiness that is thus brought upon the Jewish People, Mosheh prays that the Tribe of Binyomin should be blessed that the Divine Presence shall always protectively hover over them and bring upon them peace and harmony.
9. The blessing of the Tribe of Yosef follows on from the blessing of the Tribe of Binyomin. Firstly, in the same way, Mosheh sees that the territory of Binyomin is host to the Beis HaMikdash when it is eventually built in Yerushalaim, so too would the Sanctuary of Shiloh, the Mishkan, the transportable smaller version of the Beis HaMikdash, be situated for many years in the territory of Yosef. And secondly, Yosef and Binyomin were full brothers. In his blessing for the Tribe of Yosef, Mosheh here too clearly echoes the blessings of Yaakov to his sons and he prays that HaShem should bless Yosef's land with bountiful harvests of sweet fruit and goodly produce, with plentiful water and beneficial sunshine. In addition, Mosheh prays that the leaders that will emerge from Yosef should be granted victory over their enemies. For in the same way that Yosef, the founding father of the Tribes of Efraim and Menashe, was concerned only for the good of the family of Israel, so too are the leaders that come from the Tribes of Yosef concerned only for the Jewish People and they too should be blessed with success.
10. The Tribe of Zevulun made a partnership with the Tribe of Yissochor which assured that the Tribe of Yissochor could rely on the material support of the Tribe of Zevulun. Thus the renowned Torah scholars of the Tribe of Yissochor could devote themselves to studying Torah more than they would have been able to otherwise. In return, the Tribe of Zevulun deserve to share some of the reward of the Torah learning of Yissochor, says Mosheh. (Similar arrangements are made nowadays, too, between the business community on the one hand and Yeshiva and Kollel Torah scholars on the other whereby the merit of the Torah learning is shared with those who financially support the study of Torah.) Mosheh bestows his blessings upon the Tribe of Zevulun that

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their various business enterprises shall prosper and upon the Tribe of Yissochor that they shall be successful in their Torah endeavours. (It is interesting to note how in this regard Mosheh mentions Zevullun before Yissochor.) In his blessing of these two Tribes, Mosheh also praises them both. For through their contact with the tradespeople of Zevullun and the kindness of the people of Yissochor, foreign merchants coming to trade will come to recognize HaShem and indeed join the Jewish People as converts.

11. In his blessing of the Tribe of Gad, Mosheh praises them for their extraordinary strength used in the defence of the Jewish People and in protecting their Land, and for their steadfastness and loyalty.
12. The Tribe of Dan is blessed by Mosheh that their territory shall be well-watered and that the people of this Tribe shall enjoy the produce of their land in security.
13. As for the Tribe of Naftoli, their spacious territory shall be blessed with satisfying produce that ripens early.
14. The Tribe of Osher is blessed with beautiful children. Furthermore, their land will produce great amounts of quality olive oil and from the mountains in his territory they will mine iron and copper, all much required and much appreciated by their brother Tribes.
15. In his prophetic vision Mosheh sees the Jewish People as a self-sufficient people settled on their Land, protected by HaShem, their enemies vanquished, blessed with an abundance of corn and wine and all kinds of produce. He sees a people saved from their enemies by HaShem even before they become a threat, saved in the merit of their relying solely and completely on HaShem, a true People of G-d.
16. After having blessed his People, Mosheh our Teacher then ascended Mount Nevo, opposite the town of Yericho. From there, HaShem granted him the ability to glimpse the entire country, from the north to the south and from the east to the west. So as promised by HaShem, Mosheh did see the whole land, the Promised Land that Mosheh wanted so much to enter. There, in the Plains of Mo'av, Mosheh our Teacher, the true servant of HaShem, died at the age of one hundred and twenty years, mourned by the whole Jewish People. His youthful vigour not at all diminished and his mental faculties as sharp as ever, he died as he had lived his entire life, by the word of HaShem.
17. Yehoshua bin Nune, who had served as assistant to Mosheh and who had been appointed by HaShem to succeed him, immediately took over the leadership of the Jewish People and they willingly placed themselves under his authority.
18. *It is not for us to even try to evaluate the personality and character of that G-dly individual who was Mosheh our Teacher. Nevertheless, even if it should be at the risk of appearing to be presumptuous, it makes sense for us to try to understand why HaShem chose Mosheh to be the leader who took us out from Egypt and through whom HaShem gave us His Torah. HaShem Himself praises Mosheh in His Torah as "the most humble man who ever walked upon the face of the earth" and our Chachommim, of blessed memory, point out for us additionally that from the Torah it*

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is clearly seen that Mosheh our Teacher was a person who felt for others, who stood up for the defenceless and the downtrodden. Leaving aside for a moment all his other qualities, it appears that these two qualities, perhaps more than any others, made him the choice of HaShem for his dual mission as leader and teacher. He went out of his way to help others yet he never sought greatness for himself. Even as our leader and our veritable king, even as he was aware of the great authority vested in him by HaShem, he remained truly humble, exercising authority only because he was the agent of HaShem. Never did Mosheh allow his own personality to influence his duty as leader — he was merely the tool of HaShem. And it is this quality of true humility that also made him the ideal teacher of HaShem's Torah. For however much one might try to avoid it, the fact is that when one passes on the teachings of a master, one cannot help but inject one's own personality into those teachings, and this is going to influence those teachings, even ever so slightly. Mosheh our Teacher, however, was such a loyal agent of HaShem and was so self-effacing in his passing on the Torah that HaShem taught him, that that Torah was not influenced in the slightest by the personality of Mosheh nor by his thinking nor by his feelings nor by his emotions. What Mosheh taught was purely the Torah of HaShem — because of his humility, Mosheh our Teacher was the purest conduit for the Torah of HaShem. We have had great teachers and we have had great leaders, we have had great prophets who brought us the Word of G-d. But never will there arise from amongst the Jewish People a prophet who was so close to HaShem as was Mosheh our Teacher.

חזק

WITH THIS SIDRA IS COMPLETED

THE SEFER DEVORRIM

ספר דברים

THE FIFTH OF THE

FIVE BOOKS OF MOSHEH

חמשה חומשי תורה

The explanation of the Haftorah of Sidra וזאת הברכה is in preparation.