

# Gratitude from the Torah

By Rebbetzin Chana Bracha

## Parashat Ve'Zot Habracha

### How Can We Receive the Blessings of a World Filled with Light and Sweetness?

#### Accepting our Incompleteness as a Link Within a Beautiful Necklace

Whenever I clean for Pesach, there is always one more thing to do, the job can never be totally completed. In life as well, we are tagging our tail. When will we complete all the many tasks needed to upkeep and renovate our homes and our hearts? There is so much I'd like to accomplish in life – so many courses to prepare, books to write, relationships to rectify, and character traits to master. However, time is running out, and I must accept that we humans are mortal. How can finite beings accomplish infinite missions? No matter how much we try to “set our house in order” we cannot avoid leaving some unfinished business behind. Just as we cannot please everyone all the time, but only some people all the time, and all people some of the time, so will we never finish removing all the weeds or cutting off all the dead leaves and flowerheads. We must learn to settle for a dusty house, files with grammar mistakes, unspoken words, and unclimbable mountains. From what I have learned about the breaking of the vessels, the problem was that each vessel was standing on its own – i.e. the Sefirot were originally aligned one on top of the other, without any connection between them. None of the finite vessels could contain all the infinite light by themselves so they broke. From the shattered sparks Hashem remade the world in such a way that instead of being independent, each of the sefirot now works in synchronicity with each other. Rather than comprising one column with each sefirah on top of the other, the sefirot form a pattern of right, left, and middle, each sefirah working in tandem to complement the others. Only through the synergy of all the sefirot working together is it possible to contain the infinite light. In the same way, if we think about ourselves as a link in the chain of human history, each link needing the other to form a beautiful necklace, we can accept being incomplete in ourselves. By allowing others to complete our job, we can find fulfillment and feel blessed!

#### Inspiring Others to Continue What We Began

Often, I fall into the trap of believing that if I don't do the job myself, it won't get done, or if it does get done, it won't be done well enough. I believe this is the crux of the problem of every micro-manager. I'm working on it and try my best to delegate jobs to my capable staff and allow them to work independently. In *Parashat Ve'Zot Habracha* Moshe blesses the Israelites, tribe by tribe on the last day of his life. Sadly, Moshe had to leave this world without fulfilling his greatest yearning – to lead the Jewish people into the Promised Land. What may feel like Moshe missed the boat of fulfilling his mission, is a lack of greater perspective. Moshe's mission was no less than leading the Israelites through the Exodus and the forty-year wilderness wandering, culminating with receiving the Torah and building the Mishkan. Yehoshua – whom Moshe had ordained – was chosen to lead the Israelites to the Promised Land, conquer the land of Canaan, and divide it appropriately for each tribe. If this was not so, Moshe wouldn't have hit the rock. *Parashat Ve'Zot Habracha* concludes by describing Moshe's death and burial in the Land of Moav outside of the Land of Israel (*Devarim* 34:6). Even the greatest life is an unfinished symphony. Moshe's death on the far side of the Jordan is a consolation for all of us. None of us need to feel guilty, frustrated, angry or defeated that there are things we hoped to achieve but did not. That is how it is to be human. Our lives are like a bare microsecond set against the almost-eternity of the cosmos. For each of us, there is a river we will never cross, a promised land we will not enter, and a destination we will never reach. That Moshe, the greatest leader who ever lived, was mortal and did not see what he thought was his mission completed, that even he was capable of

making a mistake, is the most profound gift G-d could give each of us. Thus, the entire Torah culminates with this message: We are mortal; therefore make every day count. We are fallible; therefore, learn to grow from each mistake. We will not complete the journey; therefore, inspire others to continue what we began (Based on Rabbi Yonathan Sacks, *Unfinished Symphony Life-Changing Ideas, Ve'Zot Habracha* 5778).

### **The Greatest Blessing is Knowing Who You Are and Your Mission in Life**

**ספר דברים פרק לג פסוק א וְזֹאת הַבְּרָכָה אֲשֶׁר בֵּרַךְ מֹשֶׁה אִישׁ הָאֱלֹהִים אֶת בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל לִפְנֵי מוֹתוֹ:**

“This is the blessing with which Moshe, the man of G-d, blessed the children of Israel [just] before his death” (*Devarim* 33:1).

Knowing who you are and your mission in life is a true blessing. *Parashat Ve'Zot Habracha* comprises all the blessings that Moshe granted each tribe of Israel before his demise. For example, Moshe blessed Yissachar and Zevulun with distinct missions that complement each other. “To Zevulun he said: ‘Rejoice, Zevulun, in your departure, and Yissachar, in your tents” (*Devarim* 33:18). Rashi explains that Zevulun and Yissachar entered into a partnership that Zevulun would dwell at the seashore and go out in ships, to trade and make a profit, thereby providing food for Yissachar, who would sit and occupy himself in Torah study. Thus, Moshe’s blessing to Zevulun was to prosper in trade, while his blessing to Yissachar was to prosper through Torah learning and making legal decisions, especially in the realm of calculating and proclaiming the leap year and establishing the Jewish calendar (Based on Rashi, *Devarim* 33:18). This kind of partnership has continued throughout the generations until this day. Some Jews devote their lives to Torah, whereas others dedicate themselves to their career while upholding the Torah through their generous contributions. In this way, they share equally in the reward of full-time Torah learning. Although Torah study is generally considered superior to trading, Moshe mentioned Zevulun before Yissachar, even though the latter was the elder of the two because Yissachar’s Torah came through the provisions of Zevulun - (*Bereishit Rabbah* 99:9). This teaches us not to depreciate those who take up Zevulun’s mantle to work hard and become a provider for Torah scholars.

### **Why is Yosef’s Land the Most Fertile and Abundant in the Land of Israel?**

Yosef was blessed with fertile land as it states, “His land shall be blessed by Hashem, with the sweetness of the heavens with dew, and with the deep that lies below, and with the sweetness of the produce of the sun, and with the sweetness of the moon’s yield, and with the crops of early mountains, and with the sweetness of perennial hills, and with the sweetness of the land and its fullness...” (*Devarim* 33:13-16). Rashi comments, “For throughout the inheritance of all the tribes, there was no land as full of goodness as Yosef’s land” (*Sifrei* 33:13). I can testify that, so it is still today in the Land of Efraim and Menasha in the Shomron (Samaria) north of Jerusalem until Haifa! As below so Above. The physical abundance of Yosef’s land alludes to his spiritual greatness. The Netivot Shalom explains that of the four species we shake on Sukkot, the three branches of myrtle correspond to Avraham, Yitzchak, and Ya’acov, whereas the two willow branches to Moshe and Aharon. Yet the Lulav, taller than all the species, corresponds to Yosef. The lulav resembles the spine, which connects the brain of da’at with most of the body’s organs. Since the lulav is the tallest of them all, the mitzvah is referred to as “taking the lulav,” and the bracha recited is “...Who has made us holy through His mitzvot and has commanded us about taking the lulav” (“*al netilat lulav*”). The deeper reason for this blessing is that Yosef’s character trait of dedicating every desire completely to Hashem is the main service of every Jew. About Yosef it states, “he restrained himself

and said, ‘Serve the food’” (*Bereishit* 43:31). From this we learn that when we restrain ourselves from fulfilling our lusts, Hashem grants us abundance. Since everyone’s pleasures and pains are determined by heaven, when we take suffering upon ourselves by overcoming our lusts, we will enjoy only pleasures from above. When we follow in Yosef’s footsteps to overcome lusts, our blessings will overflow like Yosef’s, both spiritual blessings – “with the sweetness of the heavens” and physical blessings – “with dew and with the deep that lies below.” For those who don’t sink into this material world – Hashem prepares – a wonderful world filled with light and sweetness.

**Gratitude Focus for the Week of Parashat Devarim –  
Some Tips for Tapping into the Blessings in Your Life**

We learn from Moshe’s blessing of the tribes of Zevulun and Yissachar, to rejoice in our journeys as well as in our tents. In other words, whether we are on a path or at home, it’s important to rejoice! Also, it’s important to teach our children that sometimes the journey is just as important as the end result. The ability to rejoice is another blessing we can count on in our lives. We all experience setbacks in our lives. Focusing on the overwhelming number of positives rather than on the fewer negatives, even though those negatives seem very important at the time, can foster better perspective and balance. The capacity to feel joy is tied directly to being able to enjoy the blessings we do have, and our own joy is contagious. When others witness our ability to rejoice in our blessings, they will learn to do the same. As we move deeper into the final redemption tremendous blessings and an increased energy are sent down to earth for expanded awareness. To receive these blessings, we need to make ourselves a proper vessel.

- **When You Feel a Shift of Greater Energy Flow** – relax into letting it happen. Just be with what is. There is nothing to do, and nowhere to go, other than just letting go of expectations and allowing the moment to have its way with you. Your new blessings know exactly what needs to happen, they carry their own wisdom, so relax and allow them to do what they will.
- **Welcome the Blessings in Your Lives** – Don’t be afraid. The more you appreciate your blessings, the more they will increase. Even if the new energy shift will shake things up a bit, you can pay attention to what is going on in the moment and learn to balance your energies through self-examination.
- **Learn from the Mirror of the Negative Behavior of Others that You Notice** – everything that comes into your awareness serves as a mirror. You have called all these people and events into your life to show you parts of your consciousness you have not yet wanted to look at before. As Ba’al Shem Tov teaches whatever we see or hear about someone else, we must understand that we have a tinge of that ourselves (*Toldot Ya’acov Yosef, Parashat Lech Lecha*). If you judge others, somewhere in your psyche, you have judged yourself. We learn this from King David whom the Prophet Natan told a parable. When David judged the rich man in the parable, he learned that he had judged himself (*II Shemuel* 12:1-15).
- **Avoid Judging Others** – for judgment never heals anyone, or anything, at any time. You cannot impose your rules on others. Judgment is an attempt to make what is One into separated parts, with the hope that ‘your’ part will be superior over ‘other’ parts. This judgment derives from an inferior complex. If you truly knew yourself to be “better,” compassion would be your response.

If you have compassion you cannot judge for you understand from the point of compassion that the person who is before you at this moment can act no differently!

- **Learn to Love Through the Awareness that we are All One** – When you are one with humanity and have not placed yourself above it, tears of compassion will flow from your eyes, and you won't be able to see anything but the One – the One that we all emanate from and Whom we are part of. There is only One. You may think you are a small entity, moving through a perilous world to an unknown end. Yet, when the Oneness opens within you are going to know that we are all part of the same Oneness, and none of it can hurt you. Expanding our awareness of the dialectic between our individual gifts and missions, operating within the greater Oneness of the Creator, is the greatest blessing of all.