

**PARSHAT VE-ZOT HA-BRACHA**

Ve-zot ha-bracha is a classic example of a Parsha that almost everyone knows by heart (at least the first three aliyot), but almost no one understands. [That's because it is read numerous times in shul, but its words are very difficult to translate.]

In this week's shiur, we try to 'break ice' by undertaking a basic analysis of the Parsha's structure and theme.

**INTRODUCTION**

We begin our study with a short discussion of the two obvious problems that one encounters when studying the order of the tribes in these blessings.

First of all, one tribe (**Shimon**) appears to be missing, i.e. his tribe is not even mentioned within Moshe's blessings. Secondly, the order of these blessings (tribe by tribe) proceeds in what appears to be a rather random sequence.

To better appreciate these two problems, the following table lists the tribes according to their order in Ve-zot ha-bracha. To accentuate the apparent lack of sequence in this list, next to each 'shevet' [tribe] we note their respective matriarch and relative position according to birth.

**THE ORDER OF THE TRIBES**

#	SHEVET	MATRIARCH	& position of birth
1	Reuven	Leah	1
2	Yehuda	Leah	4
3	Levi	Leah	3
4	Binyamin	Rachel	12
5	Yosef	Rachel	11 [Efraim & Menashe]
6	Zevulun	Leah	6
7	Yissachar	Leah	5
8	Gad	Zilpa	9
9	Dan	Bilha	7
10	Naftali	Bilha	8
11	Asher	Zilpa	10

\* Note that the tribe of SHIMON is missing!

Carefully study this list. On the one hand, the order of the "shvatim" is certainly not random, as the children of the maidservants (Bilha & Zilpa) are grouped at the end, while the children of Rachel and 'sandwiched' together between Leah's elder and younger children.

On the other hand, there doesn't seem to be an apparent reason for Rachel's children to be 'inserted' in this manner. And of course, as you noticed, Shimon is 'missing'!

Furthermore, although it's pretty clear why Reuven is first, as he is the oldest, why does Moshe skip from Reuven to Yehuda? Likewise, why does Binyamin precede his older brother Yosef, and why do the children of Rachel 'interrupt' Moshe's blessings to the children of Leah?

Finally, why does Zevulun precede Yissachar, why does Gad precede Dan, and why do the children of Bilha 'interrupt' the children of Zilpa?

Even in Parshat Bamidbar, where we find the tribes listed in various orders as they prepare to organize the camp around the Mishkan (see TSC shiur), we find no list that is even slightly resembles this order of the blessings in Ve-zot ha-bracha.

In summary, although the list is not altogether random, it certainly doesn't follow any apparent logic. In our shiur, we attempt to identify its rationale. To that end, we must first consider the nature and purpose of these blessings.

**FROM YAAKOV TO MOSHE**

Ve-zot ha-bracha is not the first time in Chumash where we find that each tribe receives a blessing. Recall that back in

Parshat Va'ychi, Yaakov Avinu blesses each tribe before his death. Unlike Moshe, however, Yaakov addresses his children in almost exact age order: Reuven, Shimon, Levi, Yehuda, Zevulun & Yissachar [note slight deviation], Dan (first born of Bilha), Gad (first born of Zilpa), Asher, and Naftali.

[The only problem, of course, is that Zevulun precedes his older brother Yissachar (for an explanation, see Seforno Br. 49:13, based on Midrash Tanchuma Vayechei 11.). Although Gad & Asher precede Naftali, they may very well have been born first, depending on how one understands Breishit 30:5-10.]

The reason why Yaakov blesses his children in 'age order' is quite simple. As we explained in our shiur on Parshat Va'ychi, Yaakov (prior to his death) blesses each son according to his individual potential, as exhibited and manifest throughout each respective son's life. As those blessings related to the personal destiny of each son, it makes sense that they would follow (more or less) in the order or oldest to youngest.

Moshe, by contrast, is not the 'dying father' of twelve sons. He is rather the 'departing leader' of twelve tribes to whom he has given the Torah and who are about to conquer and occupy the Land of Israel. As we would expect, his blessings accurately reflect the setting and circumstances in which they are administered.

In the first part of our shiur, we will show how each of Moshe's blessings relates in one form or another to either the tribe's forthcoming military conquest of the land; or to their leadership potential; or to the quality of the specific 'nachala' (territory) that they are destined to inherit.

Afterward, we will show how these observations will enable us to answer our original questions concerning the strange order of the tribes in these blessings.

**THE 'GIST' OF THE BLESSINGS**

Let's quickly review the gist of each blessing, one tribe at a time, noting how each blessing relates to either the defining characteristic that tribe's inheritance [nachala], or to the tribe's role in the imminent conquest of the land.

**REUVEN**

At first glance, Moshe Rabbeinu's opening remarks to the tribe of Reuven appears to be simply a blessing of 'life'.

"Let Reuven live and not die, and let his numbers be counted" (see Devarim 33:6).

Nonetheless, both Rashi and Seforno explain how these remarks actually relate to the forthcoming conquest of the land.

Rashi explains how this blessing addresses Moshe's concern that Reuven would not receive a nachala at all - as he may have lost that right when Yaakov cursed him (on account of his sin with Bilha / see Breishit 49:3-4), just as he forfeited his claim to the 'bechora' (birthright). [See also Targum Onkelos.]

Furthermore, the fact that Reuven had already 'set up camp' **outside** the biblical borders of Eretz Canaan (in Transjordan) provided yet another reason to doubt whether Reuven would truly become an 'official' tribe of Israel. Hence, Rashi explains that the purpose of Moshe's blessing was to counter these fears, thus reassuring Reuven that he will remain 'alive,' i.e. a full fledged member of the tribes of Israel.

In contrast, Chizkuni offers a 'military' explanation for this blessing. Considering that the tribe of Reuven had recently promised to 'take the front line' in the forthcoming battles to conquer Eretz Canaan [i.e. to be the 'chalutz' - see Bamidbar 32:20-32], Moshe bestows upon them a blessing of 'life' to help them survive this most dangerous task, praying in their behalf that their 'number' ['mispar'] - population - should remain the same after battle as it was beforehand. [For a similar approach, see commentary of Rabbenu Yosef Bechor Shor.]

For the purpose of our shiur, note how both commentators make every effort to relate this blessing (and all the others) to the forthcoming events, as the twelve tribes now prepare to conquer the land.

sea and from the hidden hoards of the sand" (33:18).

## YEHUDA

"Hear Hashem the [battle] cry of Yehuda and help him lead his people. Make his hands strong for him, and help him against his enemies" (33:7).

[See Rashi and Ibn Ezra]

Clearly, the bracha to Yehuda relates to his military leadership, as Moshe foresees that the soldiers of Yehuda will be particularly enthusiastic and diligent in the conquest of their portion in the Land (see Yehoshua chapter 14 and Sefer Shoftim chapter 1).

## LEVI

After a short reference to Aharon, the tribal leader of the tribe of Levi (and "kohen gadol" /high priest) , Moshe addresses Levi as follows:

"They shall teach Your laws to Yaakov and Your instructions to Israel; they shall offer **ktoret**... and whole-offerings [**olot**] on the **mizbeiach**. God should bless his **chayil** and favor his undertakings. Help him smite the loins of those who rise against him, and don't allow his enemies to succeed" (33:8-11).

This blessing to Levi focuses on this tribe's responsibility to provide spiritual leadership, i.e. to teach God's laws and officiate in His Temple. Interestingly, however, even this function is presented in 'military' jargon [e.g. the word 'cheilo' in 33:11].

[Note also 33:9, an apparent reference to Bnei Levi's preparedness to prosecute and execute those who sinned at chet ha-egel (see Rashi 33:9 and Shmot 32:26-29). Indeed, their conduct at that point was of a 'military' nature.]

Whereas all other tribes earned their "nachala", a specific, designated portion of land, shevet Levi was scattered among the various tribes in order to serve as teachers throughout the country (note Devarim 18:1-2, "Hashem hu nachlatam!"). Understandably, then, their blessing relates to their leadership role, rather than their allocated portion in the land.

## BINYAMIN

"Beloved to God, He shall allow His **Shchina** to dwell securely within him. He constantly protects [=surrounds] him, as He rests between his shoulders" (33:12).

This blessing (recently brought to fame by a popular Avraham Fried song 'U-le'Binyamin amar...') focuses on the special quality of Binyamin's nachala, its designation to house the bet ha-mikdash (God's Temple) in Yerushalayim.

## YOSEF [Efraim & Menashe]

"God's blessing is given to his land, with the bounty of dew from heaven... with the bounty of the earth in its fullness...

His 'horns' are like those of a wild ox, with them he goes other nations... these are the 'tens of thousands' of Efraim and these are the 'thousands' of Menashe" (see 33:13-17).

The precise translation of this blessing is somewhat elusive, but it clearly speaks of the bountiful nature of the nachala apportioned to Yosef. It appears that Yosef will bear the responsibility of forming the backbone of Israel's agrarian economy (as was Yosef's job in Egypt - see Or Hachayim here).

The final verse alludes to Yosef's military competence that will grant him victory over enemy nations. Specifically, Rashi understands the final pasuk as a reference to the leadership of Yehoshua - a descendant of Efraim - who led Am Yisrael in their conquest of Eretz Canaan.

## ZEVULUN & YISSACHAR

"Rejoice Zevulun as you go out [to war; compare with Bamidbar 27:17] and Yissachar in your tents. [Their prosperity will catalyze] a call to other nations to ascend God's mountain [see Ibn Ezra & Seforno] where they will offer proper sacrifices, for they draw from the riches of the

The opening sentence may refer to Zevulun's military prowess [see Ibn Ezra's interpretation, in contrast to Rashi's, and see Shoftim 5:18], but the conclusion of the pasuk clearly relates to the importance of his nachala. Their territory was situated along the sea [the coast from Caesarea to the Acco/Haifa bay area], thus forming Israel's gateway to foreign trade and, consequently, economic relations with other nations. Moshe anticipates that these business alliances will lead to the recognition on the part of those nations of the God of Israel - the primary long-term goal of Am Yisrael (see Devarim 4:5-8 & previous shiurim on Parshiot Noach & Lech Lecha).

The nachala of Yissachar, too, facilitates international trade (and influence), as it lies in Emek Yizrael, at the heart of the **via maris** - the ancient trade route connecting Egypt with Mesopotamia. [See Seforno 33:19, who alludes to Yissachar's role in international trade.]

Furthermore, Rashbam (Breishit 49:14) understands the 'tents' of Yissachar as a reference to this tribe's involvement in agriculture, while Rabbenu Yosef Bechor Shor (here) associates Yissachar's tents with the cattle industry (compare with Breishit 4:20). All this, too, relates directly to Yissachar's portion: the fertile soil of Emek Yizreel renders it an ideal location for both agriculture and livestock breeding.

## GAD

"Blessed be He who enlarges [the nachala of] Gad. He is poised like a lion to tear off arm and scalp [i.e. military strength]. He chose for himself the best [nachala]..." (33:20-21). [The rest of the pasuk is very difficult, but most likely refers to his nachala as the chosen spot for Moshe's burial site - see Rashi.]

Once again, Moshe's bracha focuses on the unique nature of the given tribe's nachala, Gads initiative to widen his inheritance in Transjordan, as well as their military capabilities.

## DAN

"Dan is like a lion's whelp that leaps from the Bashan" (see 33:22).

Dan's blessing obviously relates to their military might and the location of their nachala - at the western slopes of the Golan Heights [Bashan is the biblical name for the Golan - see Devarim 3:8-10], today the area of Tel Dan and Kiryat Shmona in the Chula valley of the Upper Galil. Anyone who has been on a tiul to the Golan, and visited the old Syrian bunkers that overlooked the Chula valley and the area of Tel Dan and Kiryat Shmona, can easily understand how the phrase 'yezaneq min ha-Bashan' describes the nachala of Dan.

[Even though Devarim 4:43 indicates that the Golan region itself was included in Menashe's nachala, not Dan's, the Targum here explains, our pasuk means that Dan lived near the Bashan, and the land in his region was watered by the streams flowing down from the Bashan. Note as well that Ibn Ezra (and others) explain Moshe's bracha as having nothing to do with Dan's actual portion, rather the tribe's military strength. He interprets 'yezaneq min ha-Bashan' as modifying the lion to whom Dan is compared, rather than the tribe of Dan itself.]

Additionally, Rashi explains the lion metaphor as a reference to Dan's location on the border, standing guard against enemy intrusion. [Almost prophetic!]

## NAFTALI

"Naftali should be satiated [for his nachala] is full of God's blessing, to the west and south (of his brother Dan) he shall/must conquer his land" (33:23). [See Ibn Ezra's comments regarding the word 'yarasha'.]

[See also Ramban - note why he quotes the Midrash.]

Again, Moshe's bracha relates to the agricultural potential of this nachala and the conquest of that portion. [Parenthetically, Naftali's nachala is situated in the fertile and beautiful region of the Upper Galil, to the west and south of Tel Dan (including Zefat & Har Meron).]

#### ASHER

"May Asher be the most blessed of sons, may he be the favorite of his brothers and may he dip his foot in oil. Iron and copper are your door-bolts, and your security should last for all your days" (33:24).

These psukim require further elucidation, but what is clear is that they relate to two unique characteristics of Asher's nachala: its abundance of olive trees (and hence olive oil) and its location on Israel's northern border. [See Ramban's interpretation, that Asher's portion guards the country's northern border (and thus serves as an 'iron lock' securing the country). See also Seforno, who explains that the presence of iron & copper locks on their homes reflects the wealth of their land.]

#### SUMMARY

As we review all these brachot, it becomes clear that they all focus on the nature of each nachala and the conquest of the land. In fact, almost all the commentators, especially Ibn Ezra, Chizkuni, and Seforno (in addition to Rashi and Ramban), relate to this aspect of the nachalot throughout their interpretation of these psukim.

These observations can help us understand the underlying intention of the blessings that Moshe Rabbeinu bestows at this time. Aware of the military capabilities of each tribe and the anticipated geographic division of the land (note 34:1-4), Moshe blesses each tribe - encouraging them to achieve their fullest potential in the forthcoming conquest of Eretz Canaan.

[In essence, that is what 'blessings' are all about - i.e. the fulfillment of personal potential!]

Based on this understanding, we can return to our original question and make some sense out of the seemingly random order of their presentation.

#### 'INHERIT' ORDER

As these blessings relate to the "nachalot" - the upcoming inheritance of each tribe, we posit that the order of the blessings follow according to the order of the geographical location of those nachalot.

[To appreciate how this theory explains their order, it is recommended that you follow this section of the shiur while referring to a map of the nachalot of the tribes in the Land of Israel.]

Recall from the opening lines of the Parasha - how Reuven is the first tribe to receive Moshe's blessing. Reuven is first, not just because he is the oldest, but rather because Reuven was the first tribe to conquer his portion, as recorded in Bamidbar chapter 32 (& Devarim 3:16-19).

If this theory was correct, we would now expect Gad to receive the next blessing (who joined Reuven in their conquest of Transjordan). Instead, we find that the next blessing goes to Yehuda (see 33:6-8). However, one can suggest a very simple explanation - as there appears to be an 'overriding' rule that governs the order of these blessing - that Moshe first blesses the tribes from Yaakov's wives (i.e. the children of Leah & Rachel) - and only afterward blesses the tribes from the maidservants (Bilha & Zilpa).

This principle beautifully explains the order when Moshe finally blesses these four tribes (from the maidservants) towards the end of the Parasha. Note how he begins by blessing Gad (see 33:20), because they conquered their nachala first (in Transjordan) - even though Dan is the older brother (and the head of the camp in the desert /see Bamidbar chapter 2!).

These observations can also help clarify the content of

Reuven's blessing. Moshe must emphasize that **even though** Reuven's nachala lies outside the borders of Eretz Canaan, they retain their status as an 'official' shevet (as we explained earlier).

#### YEHUDA FIRST

Once we skip Gad, Reuven is followed by **Yehuda** - the first of the tribes to successfully conquer their portion of land, as detailed both in Sefer Yehoshua (chapters 14->15) and in Sefer Shoftim (1:1-15). This also explains why Yehuda's blessing focuses on their military power.

Next, Moshe Rabbeinu works his way 'up north', from Yehuda (in the south) through Binyamin to Ephraim and Menashe. This principle (of geographical order) explains why Binyamin precedes Yosef, for his nachala is located north of Yehuda, but south of Ephraim. We'll soon continue with the tribes located to the north of Ephraim, but first, we must explain what happened to Shimon & Levi.

#### A 'SOLUTION' FOR SHIMON

Our approach thus far can also provide us with a clue as to why Shimon does not receive a blessing in Ve-zot Ha-bracha. Considering that Shimon's nachala is later included (almost 'swallowed up') within the borders of Yehuda (see Yehoshua 19:1 & 19:9!), one could conclude that Shimon basically never received their own nachala (a fulfillment of Yaakov's 'blessing' to Shimon in Breishit 48:5-7). Furthermore, in the aftermath of 'chet bnot Mo'av' their numbers were severely reduced (see Bamidbar 26:14, compare 1:23!), hence we can conclude that their army may not have played a major role in the conquest of the land as well.

[Note Rashi on 33:7 (towards the end), where he quotes a Midrash Tehillim that the bracha to Shimon is actually 'included' within the bracha to Yehuda: 'shma Hashem' contains the first letters of Shimon's name, 'shin.mem.ayin'. In fact, the same wording is used when Shimon is first named by his mother: 'ki **shama Hashem** ki snu'a anochi' (see Breishit 29:33!).]

As Shimon's conquest and inheritance during the time period of Yehoshua will be almost negligible, his tribe is totally skipped.

#### WHY LEVI & BINYAMIN COME FIRST

Now, we must explain why Levi follows immediately after Yehuda, before all the other shvatim.

To do so, we must first explain why according to our theory (that the blessings relate specifically to the nachalot) - Levi should not have received any blessing, for they were not destined to receive any portion in the land - as Moshe himself has stated earlier:

"The kohanim-levi'im - the entire tribe of Levi - shall not receive a nachala with the rest of Israel ... God is his nachala, as He spoke to him" (see Devarim 18:1-2).

However, a closer analysis of this pasuk can provide us with a very meaningful reason for not only the nature of Moshe's blessing to Levi, but also its position! Note how the tribe of Levi did, indeed receive a nachala - not a tract of land, but rather 'nachalat Hashem' - i.e. as a tribe, they are destined to serve the people as God's representatives.

Towards that purpose, God separated the entire shevet of Levi to serve in the bet ha-mikdash and to teach Torah to Bnei Yisrael; and hence, this responsibility is considered their nachala.

Even though this special nachala does not carry a distinct geographical border, nonetheless the bet ha-mikdash ['makom asher yivchar Hashem' / see Devarim chapter 12] was to become the central location for the fulfillment of these responsibilities. Considering that the permanent bet ha-mikdash was destined to be built in Jerusalem [= Har ha-Moria, see Divrei Hayamim II 3:1], Moshe Rabbeinu treats the tribe of Levi as though its nachala will be that city.

As we all know, the city of Jerusalem is located precisely between the borders of the tribes of Yehuda (to the south) and Binyamin (to the north / see Yehoshua 15:8 & 18:16) - therefore

his blessing follows that of Yehuda (and precedes the blessing to Binyamin) - and deals with their tribal responsibilities to teach Torah to Israel, and officiate in the Temple:

"...They shall teach Your laws to Yaakov and Your Torah to Israel - they shall put incense and whole burnt-offering upon Your altar. God should bless his substance, and accept the work of his hands..." (see 33:8-11).

Even though the cities wherein the Levites will live are scattered among the tribes, Jerusalem will remain their center. Furthermore, in Sefer Yehoshua we learn how Yehuda becomes the first tribe to supply cities for the levi'im (see Yehoshua 21:1-4). [This may be an additional reason why Levi follows Yehuda in Ve-zot Ha-bracha.] And it only makes sense that their primary cities would be located nearby Jerusalem - within the tribes of Yehuda and Binyamin.

## BINYAMIN

As the order proceeds from south to north, Binyamin receives the next blessing, i.e. following Levi. This 'juxtaposition' to Levi also explains why Moshe's blessing to Binyamin focuses first and foremost on this tribe's role as the territory wherein God will allow His Shchina to dwell (see 33:12-13!) Recall how Jerusalem is located on its southern border, while the mishkan was located in other cities within Binyamin, such as Gilgal, Nov, and Givon. Accordingly, Binyamin's bracha deals exclusively with God's promise that His **Shchina** will dwell within this tribe's borders ['shoulders'].

## YOSEF & THE SHOMRON

As we proceed northward from the territory of Binyamin, we enter the region settled by the children of **Yosef**, first Efraim and then Menashe (located farther to the north). Once again, our theory also explains why Moshe's blessing to Yosef focuses primarily on the land's vast agricultural potential and the tribe's military strength.

## YISSACHAR & ZEVLUN

To explain why Yissachar and Zevulun follow Menashe, we must consider once again the geography of the land.

Thus far, we have seen how the blessings proceed from north to south, however, as the borders of Efraim & Menashe extend from the Mediterranean Sea to the Jordan River, we have not yet found an example of whether an eastern territory should precede a western one (or visa versa). We do encounter this problem in regard to Yissachar and Zevulun, as both occupy the area north of Yosef's border, Zevulun to the west (along the coast) and Yissachar to the east (in Emek Yizrael until the Jordan River).

As we explained earlier, this territory serves as the gateway to foreign trade, convoys and shipping, as reflected in Moshe's blessings to Yissachar and Zevulun.

Although no 'geographical' reason seems to warrant Zevulun's precedence over his older brother, Yissachar, Moshe Rabbeinu follows the pattern set by Yaakov Avinu, who also blessed Zevulun before Yissachar (see Breishit 49:13-14). It should also be noted that Zevulun precedes Yissachar in Sefer Yehoshua chapter 19, as well, in the context of the apportionment of the land among the tribes.

[Rashi also provides an answer relating to the famous Yissachar/Zevulun 'work/study Torah' arrangement.]

## BNEI HA-SHFACHOT

As we explained above, Moshe blesses the children of Yaakov's maidservants only after he completes the blessings to Leah and Rachel's children. However, consistent with his pattern heretofore, he presents his blessings in the order of their nachalot, rather than the order of their births.

Moshe begins this group of shvatim with **Gad**, who, together with Reuven, took their nachala first, in Transjordan, before the other tribes established their settlements. Dan & Naftali follow, as their nachalot are situated to the north of Yissachar & Zevulun. Finally he comes to Asher, whose nachala extends along the

entire northern border of Israel (today southern Lebanon).

These geographic considerations explain the progression of Moshe's blessing, in what would otherwise have been considered a very strange internal order.

Furthermore, this analysis also provides us with a better appreciation of the content of these final four blessings, as they focus on the beauty of the land, each tribe's need for expansion, and how they protect Israel's northern and eastern borders. Moshe's blessings thus encourage these tribes, who reside far away from the center of the country, to rise to the challenges that their nachalot present. [Sefer Yehoshua and Sefer Shoftim provide us with numerous examples of how difficult this challenge truly was.]

## The OPENER & the FINALE

Now that we have explained the individual brachot and their sequence, we conclude our shiur by taking a quick look at Moshe Rabbeinu's opening and concluding comments, to see how they relate to our discussion thus far.

Moshe introduces his brachot with a four-pasuk 'opener' (see 33:2-5) and a corresponding four-pasuk 'closer' (see 33:26-29). The introductory psukim - the precise translation of which requires further discussion beyond the scope of this shiur - clearly point to Ma'amad Har Sinai and Moshe's role as the transmitter of the laws commanded at Har Sinai.

Moshe's closing remarks focus on God as the Protector of Israel, Who provides close supervision (see 33:26), assistance in battle (see 33:26,27,29), and agricultural and economic prosperity (see 33:26 & 28).

Not only do these opening and closing remarks form the appropriate framework for the individual blessings, they also directly relate to the primary theme of Sefer Devarim (and, for that matter, Chumash as a whole). God has chosen the Jewish nation to represent Him as His model nation to guide mankind in the proper direction. To that end, He gave them the Torah (see 33:2-5), which contains the specific laws whose observance in the Promised Land leads to the realization of that goal. Now, before his death, Moshe blesses Bnei Yisrael that they fulfill that potential, that God assist them in their achievement of these goals, in the nachala they are about to conquer and occupy. Certainly, a most appropriate way for Moshe Rabbeinu to finish the Torah, and thus conclude his life's mission!

chazak chazak ve-nitchazek  
shabbat shalom ve-chag sameiach,  
menachem

## FOR FURTHER IYUN

A. Be sure to see Ramban & Ibn Ezra on 33:7. Many of the points raised in the above shiur are discussed in their peirushim to this pasuk. The Ramban is rather lengthy, but well worth reading!

B. In the context of the bracha to Reuven - that he should 'live', we mentioned several explanations: either that he should not lose his portion on account of his sin with Bilha, or he should retain his status as part of the twelve tribes in spite of settling in Transjordan, or that his men should survive the dangers of the front line where they stood during the conquest of Eretz Yisrael. Abarbanel adds an additional element to this final approach, that the women and children of Reuven remained behind across the Jordan as the men went to fight in Eretz Yisrael proper (see Bamidbar 32). Moshe thus prays on behalf of the defenseless wives and youngsters who were exposed to the possibility of attack by hostile neighbors.

With respect to the possibility that Moshe was concerned about the Jordan River isolating Reuven from the rest of the nation, see Seforno on this pasuk, who advances a variation of this general approach.

C. Moshe beseeches, "Hear, Hashem, the cry of Yehuda..." There are two ways to explain this 'cry'. In the shiur we followed the approach of Rashi and Ramban, that this 'cry' refers to

wartime prayers. Moshe expresses his hope that Hashem will listen to Yehuda's pleas during warfare. Chazal, however, in Masechet Makkot 11b, explain that Moshe here prays for Yehuda's release from the excommunication to which he was subjected as a result of his promise to Yaakov (Breishit 43:9). Based on these two approaches and our discussion of Reuven's bracha, explain the phrase 'Ve-zot li-Yehuda' and the relationship between Moshe's brachot to Reuven and Yehuda. [See Da'at Zkenim.]

D. Targum Yonatan on Devarim 18:2 ('Hashem Hu nachalato') writes that the twenty-four gifts given to the kohanim constitute the nachala of the tribe of Levi. Compare this comment with our understanding of Levi's nachala, and assess this notion in light of Moshe's bracha to Levi and this shiur.

E. Rashi offers one interpretation of the final clause of Levi's bracha (33:11) that it foresees the battle waged by the Chashmonaim (who were kohanim, descendants of Levi) against the Greeks (see also Targum Yonatan). Based on your knowledge of the history of Chanukka and in light of our discussion in this shiur, explain how this struggle may be viewed as part of Levi's conquest of 'his portion' in Eretz Yisrael. How does this Midrashic approach relate to the pshtat of the pasuk as explained in this shiur?

F. A particularly novel interpretation of Binyamin's bracha is offered by Rabbenu Yosef Bechor Shor. He explains the bracha as referring not to Hashem's dwelling in Binyamin's portion, but rather to the constant influx of kohanim and levi'im into the borders of Nachalat Binyamin to serve in the mikdash. (Meaning, 'yishkon' and 'chofef' modify the tribe of Levi, not God.) Thus, the brachot to Levi and Binyamin essentially constitute a single bracha. Explain how this may add to the ideas discussed in this shiur regarding the juxtaposition between these two brachot.

G. The Midrash towards the beginning of Shmot Rabba writes that the name 'Zevulun' refers to the fact "that Hashem had His Shchina dwell among them [Bnei Yisrael]... 'Zevulun' means the bet ha-mikdash, as it says, 'I [Shlomo] have built a 'bet zvu' for You...'"

Explain this association between Zevulun and the mikdash based on Moshe's bracha to this tribe in Ve-zot Ha-bracha.

H. Contrast Targum Onkelos' translation of the expression 'gur aryeh' in Yaakov's bracha to Yehuda (Breishit 49:9) with his explanation of the exact same term in Moshe's bracha to Dan (Devarim 33:22). Explain how this difference may reflect the distinction between Yaakov's brachot and Moshe's, as discussed in this shiur. [See also question K in Further Iyun.]

## I. BACK TO SHIMON

We suggested our own reason for Shimon's conspicuous absence from this parsha, but the commentators provide several additional reasons. Rashi cites their sin with bnot Mo'av, the responsibility for which seems to lie with shevet Shimon. Ibn Ezra suggests that Moshe may be following the lead of Yaakov, who cursed Shimon & Levi instead of blessing them. Levi, however, earned Moshe's blessing on account of Aharon, a man of stature with no equal in the tribe of Shimon. [In terms of Reuven, who was also cursed by Yaakov, the Ibn Ezra explains that in reality Yaakov did bless Reuven, and he thus earned Moshe's bracha, as well.]

Rabbenu Yosef Bechor Shor also maintains that Moshe followed Yaakov's lead in withholding a bracha from Shimon, but offers a different explanation for Reuven's right to a bracha. Since Moshe himself ordered the tribe of Reuven to join Gad in the front lines in the conquest of Eretz Yisrael, he had to bless Reuven with military success, just as he blessed Gad.]

Ramban posits an interesting theory - the 'twelve rule' - that whenever the tribes are mentioned, there can be only twelve of them. Usually, Levi is omitted and Yosef is replaced by Efraim & Menashe. But now that all three - Levi, Efraim and Menashe -

must be included, one shevet must be dropped. **Shimon**, whose nachala, as we have seen, is situated within Yehuda's portion, and who was cursed by Yaakov, serves as the best candidate to forfeit his blessing.

J. One question we have not addressed is why Menashe is not mentioned before Yehuda. After all, Menashe - like Reuven - settled before the other tribes, in Transjordan. This issue relates to the general and more complicated topic concerning nachalat Menashe, why it was divided into two, and how their portion relates (or doesn't relate) to Reuven and Gad's - all beyond the scope of this week's shiur.

K. We noted in the shiur the fundamental distinction between Moshe's brachot in our parsha and Yaakov's blessings to his sons in Parshat Vayechi. The Midrash, however, actually draws a parallel of sorts between these two sets of blessings: "And this is that which their father [Yaakov] spoke unto them: [Yaakov told his sons,] another man of similar stature is destined to bless you, and from where I have left off he shall begin..." (Breishit Rabba 100:12).

Where in the history of Am Yisrael did Yaakov 'leave off'? Where did Moshe begin? How may this Midrash be understood in light of this shiur?

L. We did not address in the shiur the reason why Moshe felt compelled to divide the tribes into the two groups, the sons of the maidservants and those of Rachel and Leah. A precedent for this differentiation with regard to Bnei Yisrael's settlement in the land exists back in Parshat Vayechi. Yaakov Avinu bestows upon Yosef the legal status of the bechora, which grants him a double portion in Eretz Yisrael (Breishit 48:5). Divrei Hayamim I 5:1 tells us that the rights of the bechora were taken away from Reuven as a result of his sin with Bilha and transferred to Yosef.

Needless to say, several children - including two firstborns, from both Bilha and Zilpa - were born in between Reuven and Yosef. However, the firstborns of the maidservants did not qualify for the rights of the double nachala. Apparently, although all twelve tribes earned equal membership in Bnei Yisrael, some hierarchical system remained at least with regard to the settlement of the Land. Perhaps for this reason Moshe arranged his blessings for the successful occupation and settlement of Eretz Yisrael according to this division.