
THE TANACH STUDY CENTER mail.tanach.org
In Memory of Rabbi Abraham Leibtag
Questions for Self Study - by Menachem Leibtag

PARSHAT VE-ZOT HA-BRACHA

PART I - QUESTIONS FOR THE 'SHABBOS TABLE'

YAD HA'CHAZAKA

1. As you are probably aware, even though the Rambam titled his famous halachic work **Mishneh Torah**, the more popular name of this work is **Yad Ha-chazaka**. [In his introduction to the Mishneh Torah, Rambam explains the reason for this name.]

This 'alternate' name [Yad Ha-chazaka] was not given by the Rambam himself, but rather it became popular a generation or two later.

Based on the last two psukim of Chumash, can you suggest a probable reason for why this name was chosen?

Can you suggest a reason why there was 'need' for an alternate name, i.e. why the name **yad ha-chazaka** was 'preferred' over the name **mishneh torah**?

[In your answer, relate to the fact that Mishneh Torah is also an alternate name for Sefer Devarim (as well of course to the 'gematria' of the word **yad**).

2. In the final pasuk of Chumash (34:12) we find two phrases: 'yad ha-chazaka' & 'mora gadol'.

In your opinion, what do each of these two phrases refer to?

See Rashi & Ramban. How do they answer this question?

Note how both offer the same, but opposite interpretation!

Can you explain why?

How do they each support their respective peirushim?

See also Seforno. Is this identical to Ramban or different?

3. See the final Ramban on Chumash from 34:11(till the end) & enjoy!

TORAH TZIVA LANU MOSHE

1. The famous pasuk: "Torah tziva lanu Moshe, **morasha** kehilat Yaakov" (33:4) - the very first pasuk that we teach our children - is found in the opening section of Parshat Ve-zot Ha-bracha.

How would you translate the word **morasha** in the context of this pasuk? [Did you say 'inheritance' or 'tradition'?]

What is the 'shoresh' [root] of this word?

2. What precisely does the word **morasha** imply, and how does this relate to our connection [or obligation] to Torah study?

Can you recall any other use of this word (or its shoresh) in Chumash? If so, where, and how does it relate to its use in this pasuk? [If you have time, see the TSC shiur on Parshat Mas'ei.]

3. Next, review Shmot 6:7-8; noting the meaning of the word **morasha** and its context. Does it have the same meaning as it did in Devarim 33:4?

Can you explain why yes, or why not?

How does that pasuk (i.e. Shmot 6:8) relate to Breishit 15:7-8,18-19. [Note shoresh 'yerusha' & 'brit'.]

Relate this to Shmot 6:2-5!

Relate this to this same shoresh in Bamidbar 33:50-54. Note also Sefer Shoftim 1:27-33.

4. Based on the above sources, would say that **morasha** [/yerusha] implies something **active** or **passive**? Explain.

How would this affect your understanding of Devarim 33:4?

How would this affect the nature of our obligation to study Torah, and the manner by which we acquire it.

[How would this relate to Torah study methods like these questions (i.e. that require effort), or studying Gemara 'be-iyun' etc.?]

5. See Avot 2:12 ('hatken atzmecha...'), relate this mishna to the above questions.!

PART II - QUESTIONS FOR PREPARATION (for weekly shiur)

1. Review 33:1-27 (i.e. the 'blessings' of Parshat Ve-zot Ha-bracha), noting primarily the order by which Moshe Rabbeinu addresses the 'shvatim' (tribes). [Make a list of their order.] Also, if you have time, try to understand the primary topic of each of these blessing (a translation will probably be helpful, as the words are quite difficult).

Can you discern any logic to the order of the shvatim, or does the order appear to be rather random?

Is there anything special about the location of the blessings to the 'bnei ha-shfachat'?

2. Do **all** of the tribes receive 'brachot' from Moshe? If not, which shvatim are missing? Can you suggest a reason why?

Compare Moshe Rabbeinu's blessing to those of Yaakov in Breishit 49:1-28. [Relate this to the above question.]

What is the order of the shvatim in Yaakov's brachot? Can you explain how and why it is different than the order of Moshe's brachot?

3. Review Parshat Bamidbar (chapters 1 & 2), noting the order of the shvatim (there are three examples / see TSC shiur on Parshat Bamidbar).

Is the order of any of those lists similar in any manner to the order of Moshe Rabbeinu's brachot in Ve-zot Ha-bracha?

4. When Yaakov blessed his children (in Parshat Vayechi), in what order did he address them?

Is the order in Ve-zot Ha-bracha similar in any way to any of these previous orders?

If so, explain in what manner it is similar;

explain as well in what manner it is different!

5. In your opinion, (and based on their content) what is the purpose of these brachot that Moshe bestows?

In what manner does this purpose affect their order?

6. If you are familiar with the map of Israel and the locations where each tribe received their inheritance (as detailed in Sefer Yehoshua chapters 13-19); then attempt to relate both the topic of these brachot as well as the order of the shvatim to the 'nachalot' that each shevet will later inherit when they conquer the land..

Can you relate their order to any other aspect of the nachalot or 'kibbush ha-arets' (conquering the land).

If so, can you explain the thematic connection of this order to the context of these brachot?

7. See first two questions in the Parshanut section below.

[For 'extra credit']

8. Note the division of the individual 'parshiot' in chapter 33. Can you explain its logic? [What appears to be difficult?]

Does each shevet receive its own 'parshia'?

If not, which shvatim are exceptions?

[Is there a logic behind these 'pairs' of shvatim?]

Compare this now to the division of 'parshiot' in the blessing of Yaakov Avinu in Breishit chapter 49. In what manner is it similar, in what manner is it different?

PART III - PARSHANUT

1. In case you didn't figure it out from the above questions, Shimon is not mentioned in Moshe Rabbeinu's brachot. Note how the various commentators relate to this:

First, see Ibn Ezra on 33:6. Note how he connects this to the events of chet bnot Midyan in Bamidbar 25:1-18.

[Relate his approach to our previous shiur on Parshat Pinchas relating to 'mifkad ha-nachalot' and that sin!]

Note how Ibn Ezra provides two approaches. Explain how they reflect two different exegetical approaches.

Next, see Rashi on 33:7 ['shma Hashem kol Yehuda...'].
 Is Rashi the same as Ibn Ezra's first approach or different?
 Note how Rashi understands 'shma Hashem...' as alluding to Shimon. To appreciate this Rashi, note Breishit 29:33!
 See also Chizkuni at the end of his peirush to 33:7.
 How is this peirush similar to Rashi & how is it different?
 Relate his peirush to Rashi on Breishit 42:24!
 See also Seforno's commentary on 33:7. In your opinion, does this Seforno allude to an answer to the above question regarding the lack of a blessing to Shimon?

Finally, see Ramban on 33:6. It is very long, but very important. Note how he relates to the two approaches raised by Ibn Ezra. What is the main point the Ramban adds in his peirush.
 Note (once again) how Ramban bases his approach on a very comprehensive analysis comparing all of the other instances when the 'twelve' tribes are mentioned.

2. Return to the Ramban on 33:6. Note how Ramban explains the reason for the order of the shvatim.
 Note all of the different considerations that Ramban relates to as he explains the order.
 See Ibn Ezra's explanation (above) as well in regard to the order.
 In your opinion, how are these two approaches different, and how are they similar?
 Finally, see Rashi on 33:7, 33:12 & 33:18, noting how he explains the logic of the order of the shvatim.
 In what manner is Rashi's approach different than Ramban's? In your opinion, which explanation seems most convincing?

BLESSINGS or 'PROMISES'?

3. Review 33:1-5, noting how Moshe Rabbeinu's blessing begins with a general statement to all of the shvatim, which later follows with specific blessings to each shevet in 33:6.
 In your opinion, is this 'opener' (33:2-5) a blessing; a statement, a promise, a review? Explain your answer.
 How does this 'opener' relate to the actual blessings that are later given to each shevet? [Is there a thematic connection?]

Now (on the flip side of these brachot), note how the blessing to Asher concludes (i.e. study 33:24-29). In your opinion, is this entire section a blessing only to Asher, or does it contain a section that relates (once again) to all of the shvatim? If so, where does the blessing to Asher end, and this 'closing section' for all the tribes begin?

As above, is this 'closing section': a blessing, a statement, a promise, or a review? How does it relate to the individual brachot to each shevet?

Next, note the 'machloket' on this issue between Rashi 33:25 and Ibn Ezra on this topic.

Note also the interpretations of Ramban & Seforno. In your opinion, do they agree with Rashi or Ibn Ezra?

Can you explain the reason for these differing opinions?

WHO IS 'VAYEHI'?

4. Read 33:5 -'vayehi bi-yeshurun melech'. In your opinion - **who** is the 'melech' that this pasuk refers to?

See Rashi and Seforno, in contrast to Ibn Ezra, Ramban and Rasag!

As usual, can you explain the reason for this machloket. How does it relate to the topic of the brachot themselves?

WHO WROTE THE LAST 8 PSUKIM?

5. What is problematic concerning chapter 34 (in relation to 31:24-26), especially from 34:5-34:12.

How does the Gemara in Bava Batra 14b (bottom) answer this question. [Quoted by Rashi on 34:5.]

Note also Rashbam on 34:1. How does this Rashbam relate to this question?

Finally see the famous Ibn Ezra on 34:1, see also Ibn Ezra on 34:6 (to the end). What makes this Ibn Ezra so controversial?

In what manner does this Ibn Ezra contradict the Gemara in Bava Batra 14b. How could you explain that Ibn Ezra actually bases his peirush on that 'sugya'?

Note also Ibn Ezra on Devarim 1:2 where he alludes to what he calls 'sod ha-shteim asar'. Do you understand what this has to do with the number 12 (relate to chapter 34, and the amount of psukim in that chapter)?

Why do you think that Ibn Ezra refers to this as a 'sod'?

be-hatzlacha,
 ve-chazak, chazak, ve-nitchazek
 menachem