

Nature in the Parasha

By Rebbetzin Chana Bracha Siegelbaum

Parashat V'Zot Habracha – The Land of Paradisiacal Blessings

Wrapped in Blessings

“When the end is good everything is good,” or in Shakespearian English “All’s well that ends well.” The last *parasha* in the Torah is all about blessing. Just as Ya’acov blessed his children before he passed on, so was Moshe’s last words dedicated to blessing the tribes of Israel. Ever since, it has become the Jewish way is to end with blessings. For example, a Jewish wedding ends with the *sheva bracha* (the seven wedding blessings). The meaning of the Hebrew word בְּרָכָה/*beracha* is a little different than the English word, ‘blessing.’ A *beracha* brings about growth. It is related to the word לְהַבְרִיךְ//*havrich* – a farming process to propagate the grapevine by putting part of the vine underground to sprout roots, thereby beginning a new planting. When we recite a *beracha*, we take part in revealing G-d’s goodness and abundance concealed and hidden in the upper worlds and bringing it down into our material world. A *beracha* is a request of G-d to take from His heavenly repository of abundance (his pool or his pond – בְּרִיכָה/*breicha*) and to send it down to us who live in this lowly dark world of the material. This *beracha* is the coming down of the needed material assistance from G-d. Nothing in the world can grow without Hashem’s *beracha*. This is why I told the young guy whom I had hired to turn over my soil, “Please break up all the big clayey lumps, add compost and don’t forget to pray that the earth will welcome new growth!”

Israel Dwells Alone

After Moshe completed blessing each of the individual tribes of Israel, he moves on to a general blessing of the entire people.

ספר דברים פרק לג

(כח) וַיִּשְׁכֵּן יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּטַח בְּדָד עַיִן יַעֲקֹב אֶל אֶרֶץ דָּגָן וְתִירוֹשׁ אֶף שָׁמִיּוֹ יַעֲרֹפוּ טָל:

“Thus Israel dwells in safety; the wellspring of Ya’acov alone, in a land of grain and wine, under heavens dripping dew” (*Devarim* 33:28).

History teaches us that Israel always stands alone. We cannot rely on any allies or friends to back us up or support us. It is only due to Hashem’s miracles that we are still alive and kicking here in the Holy Land. Look at the recent news, how many times have Israel been condemned by the UN? No matter how we try to defend ourselves against constant terror, the world condemns Israel. This happens over and over again, most recently after the Jerusalem murder this Rosh Hashana of an Israeli grandfather by four rock throwing Arabs. Israel is blamed for provoking this murder by a few Jews who insisting on their right to visit the Temple Mount. Spokesman John Kirby said the Obama Administration was “deeply concerned by the recent violence and escalating tensions surrounding the Haram Al-Sharif/Temple Mount. He subtly suggested Israel and visiting Jews were at least as much to blame for the situation as the rioting Muslims.”

<http://www.israeltoday.co.il/NewsItem/tabid/178/nid/27386/Default.aspx>

<http://www.israelnationalnews.com/News/News.aspx/201105#.VgeKbJuhfIU>



Therefore, Israel has to realize that “we dwell alone and we cannot allow world opinion dictate our actions. Whatever we do, will be turned against us. Even if we don’t allow our soldiers to defend our lives, the media still portrays us as the villains. When we internalize this lesson and learn to care about Hashem’s command rather than world opinion, we are on the way to redemption. The expression, “עַיִן/eyn – the eye or wellspring of Ya’acov can refer to the seed of Israel. The Ohr HaChaim *hakadosh* learns from our Torah verse that the true security of Israel is only when we dwell alone. He explains that our Torah verse is connected with the previous verse that mentions the destruction of the enemies (*Devarim* 33:27). Only after all the enemies in the land have been destroyed will Israel dwell alone in security. Moreover, although the eye of Israel will relish in grain and wine – to eat from the fruit and be satiated with the goodness of the land, Israel will not become overindulgent and haughty as long as other nations do not dwell with them in the land (Ohr HaChaim, *Devarim* 33:28). Ohr HaChaim is referring to the Torah verse from last week’s *parasha*, “Israel grew fat and kicked...” (*Devarim* 32:15). This verse describes the possible negative influence of affluence. At times prosperity may cause us to become haughty and feel that we don’t need G-d in our lives. However, when we “dwell alone” on our land protected from the negative influence of the other nations, we will be able to handle abundance and remain connected to Hashem, realizing that it is all His blessings. I believe that Ohr HaChaim had in mind that there is a deep spiritual connection between the people of Israel, the land of Israel and the G-d of Israel. When this connection is blocked, negativity arises. However, when there is nothing blocking this direct connection, which can be accessed in the Holy Land through its holy produce, then Hashem’s blessings can flow down smoothly and be clearly experienced by all the people of Israel.

Security from Enemies and Rain under the Grapevine

This redemptive flow will allow each individual Jew to dwell securely, “each under his wine and under his fig-tree.” After the enemy will be driven out, Israel can dwell securely even when we “dwell alone” on the countryside far away from the protection of the big cities (Rashi). In the time of redemption, we will even be able to dwell comfortably under our grapevine without ever being bothered by the rainfall. Sforno explains that paralleling Mashiach’s teaching which is like the dripping of dew that everyone appreciates and thirsts for, the heaven will also bring forth dew in abundance to the land of grain and wine, so that no rain or additional irrigation will be necessary. This is according to the original plan of creation before the sin of the first human being, when “a mist would rise and water the land” (*Bereishit* 2:6). In this way, the land on its own will become a land of grain and wine, when the blessed dew will increase to sustain its residents in fruitful abundance. May it be Your will that we will experience soon how the land of Israel will produce muffins as predicted in the Talmud (*Babylonian Talmud, Ketuvot* 11b); (Sforno, *Devarim* 33:28).

The Land of Grain and Wine

“Ein Ya’acov” also means the wellspring of Israel. Rabbi Shimshon Rephael Hirsch notices that it doesn’t state, “Ya’acov in the wellspring of the land of grain and wine” but rather, “the wellspring of Ya’acov in the land of grain and wine.” This indicates that Ya’acov doesn’t prosper on account of the land, rather it is the land which becomes prosperous on account of Ya’acov. A wellspring emanates from the children of Israel to the land and transforms it to become the “land of grain

and wine.” The flourishing of the land is not dependent on natural physical causes, but rather on the ethical conduct expected of the Jewish people. Fulfilling our ethical purpose will be a wellspring of *beracha* for our land. Therefore, “even the heaven will drip dew.” It’s impossible to say that the word “even” refers to the dew, it wouldn’t make sense to say that the heavens will drip even dew in abundance, since dew is a more natural source of moisture than rain. Even during years of drought when there was no rain, there always remain dew on the land (*Babylonian Talmud, Ta’anit* 3:a-b). The meaning of the word “even” refers to the heavens, that even the constant natural phenomenon of dew will be produced by a special heavenly blessing. The heaven will bring forth dew as a blessing because it is stretched forth above the land of Israel, corresponding to the ethical conduct of Israel, which warrants this blessing. Thus, the good deeds of the Jewish people will be recognized even through the otherwise natural dew (Hisch Commentary on *Devarim* 33:28). I look forward to the time, when we will live up to our spiritual and ethical potential. Then not only will we no longer need to spend time and resources in watering the gardens, we will even no longer need to get soaking wet by the downpour of rain.

Won’t it be amazing to experience the redemption when we will merit the increased blessing of the miraculous heavenly dew sustaining the land in abundance just like in the Garden of Eden!