



Dayan Yehonoson Hool

Federation Beis Din

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Parshah

SIMCHAS TORAH - THE BEGINNING

The *gemoro* (Megillah, 31a) teaches that every year on the last day of the *yom tov* of Succos, we *lein* the *parshah* of Vezos Habrachah. This is not only in line with our custom to complete the public reading of the whole Torah every year on Simchas Torah. There was an ancient *minhag* in Eretz Yisroel to complete the reading of the Torah only once every three years (Megillah 29b), but nonetheless, points out the Meshech Chochmah, on the last day of *yom tov* they would *lein* Vezos Habrachah.

So it is clear that the *parshah* itself has an intrinsic connection to this day.

The *gemoro* (Succah, 55b) says that the seventy cows offered up in the Beis Hamikdash on Succos were done so on behalf of the seventy nations of the world. On Shemini Atzeres, only one cow is offered, which alludes to Klal Yisroel. The *gemoro* relates a parable: A king once made a public feast that lasted several days. On the last day, when everyone had gone home, he called his best friend, and said, "Make for me a small meal, just for you and I." So too, at the end of Succos when we have invoked all the nations of the world, on Shemini Atzeres, we make a *yom tov* that alludes to the private, intimate connection that Klal Yisroel has with Hashem.

For this reason, says the Meshech Chochmah, we *lein* Vezos Habrachah, which opens with the giving of the Torah. אף חובב עמים – "Hashem left all the nations of the world and let the Divine Presence rest only on Klal Yisroel, and gave them the Torah" (Rashi, quoting Sifri). It is with this giving of the Torah that Hashem's choosing of us from amongst all the nations is most apparent, and therefore it is fitting to read these verses on this auspicious day, the private celebration between Hashem and His people.

"This final day of Yom Tov is called Simchas Torah, because everyone is joyful and makes a *seudas mishteh* on the occasion of the completion of the Torah" (Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim, 669:1). The source for celebration when completing the Torah is a *medrash* regarding Shlomo Hamelech. When

he became king, he had a prophetic dream, in which Hashem offered him to ask for whatever he wanted. Shlomo did not ask for long life, great riches or honour. Instead, he asked for *chochmah* – "A heart to judge Your people, to understand between good and bad." Hashem replied that he would be granted a wise and understanding heart, and in addition, although he didn't ask for them, he would be granted wealth and honour too. When Shlomo awoke, he went to Yerusholayim, offered up *korbonos*, and made a feast for all his servants. (Melochim I, 3,15). From here, says the *medrash*, we learn that one makes a *seudah* upon completion of the Torah.

The obvious question that arises is that it would appear that Shlomo had not completed anything. On the contrary, having now been granted great wisdom, he was about to begin the greatest study of Torah that would ever be, so why do we see from here that one makes a *seudah* upon completion of the Torah?

The inevitable answer must be that the whole point of the celebration of the completion of the Torah is that it opens up new beginnings. We don't merely celebrate past achievements. We celebrate the fact that these achievements have given us the springboard to move on to yet greater accomplishments.

"Come and see how the ways of Hashem are unlike those of man. With man, an empty vessel can be filled, whereas a full one cannot. With Hashem, though, a full vessel can contain more, whereas an empty one cannot." (Berachos, 40a)

Only when one is full with Torah can one truly take on the great *chochmah* of Torah. The more Torah one learns, the more one is enabled to receive yet more understanding, more depth, more wisdom. The completion of the Torah is an attainment that fills one with tremendous potential to reach out and absorb Chochmas Hatorah. Having completed the Torah, we can now begin to learn the Torah.

When Shlomo Hamelech received boundless *chochmah* from Hashem, he made a celebratory feast in anticipation of the heights of Torah that he could now ascertain. That feast of Shlomo Hamelech, says the Ramban, is echoed in the *seudah* that the Elders of Klal Yisroel ate on Har Sinai (Shemos, 24:10), when they celebrated receiving the Torah. It is a celebration of future potential.

In that case, we learn from this that when we complete the Torah, and thus have achieved additional potential for achieving and accomplishing yet greater insight and interpretation of the Torah, we too make a celebratory *seudah*.

For this reason, as soon as we finish Vezos Habrachah, we begin *leining* from Bereishis. This, after all, is the whole point of the celebration – by completing the Torah, we are now able to begin the Torah anew, enriched with the Torah learnt previously that prepares us for ever grander achievements in *limud haTorah*. And what greater cause for celebration can there be?

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2. Moshe was told to write the Torah and give it to the Jews. In (34:5) it tells us that Moshe died. Who wrote this?