

פרשת וזאת הברכה
קדושה שלישית (קדוש קדוש)

אֵישׁ אֱלֹהִים בָּרַךְ לְשִׁבְטֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל הַבְּרוּרִים.
הִנֵּה מִטֵּר תּוֹכְחָה וְטַל בְּרָכָה פִּיּוּ וּלְשׁוֹנוֹ מִמְטִירִים.
רֹאשׁ דְּבָרָיו "יוי", אֲשֶׁר "בָּא בְּסִינַי" בְּהוֹד וְהִדְרִים,
נָחַל לְעַמּוֹ תּוֹרָה – צֶדֶק וּמִשְׁפָּט וּמִיִּשְׁרָיִם.

5 בָּרַךְ יִבְרַךְ לְבָנָיו הַיְקָרִים.
וְאֵל יְמוֹת כְּמוֹת סוֹרְרִים,
וּמִתְּיוֹ לֹא יִפְקְדוּ מִסְּפוּרִים.
וְעֶזְרָ יוֹי יִהְיֶה לוֹ מְצָרִים.
אָמַר: נִשְׂא תָמִים וְאוֹרִים,
יִמְחַץ מִתְּנֵי קָמְיוֹ, וְלֹא יִקּוּמוּן סְרָרִים.
יְדִיד אֵל, שָׁכַן בְּמִשְׁכְּנֵי אֵל הַטְּהוֹרִים, [
אָמַר: תִּבְרַךְ אֶרְצוֹ, וְלוֹ מִשְׁפָּט בְּכוֹרִים.
יִשְׁמַח בְּנִפְתַּת צוּף נְהָרִים,
בְּאֵהָלָיו, יִדְעֵי בִינָה בְּמַחְקָרִים.]
כְּלָבִיא יִשְׁכֵּן, וְיִטְרֹף כְּכַפְרִים.
כְּגוֹר אֲרִיָּה, יִרְדַּ בְּגַבּוֹרִים!
שִׁבְעַ רְצוֹן יִהְיֶה, בְּאֵיִן מַחְסָרִים.
מִבְּנִים בְּרוּךְ – יִהְיֶה רְצוֹן אֲחִיו הַכְּשָׁרִים.
וַיַּעַל נְבִיא יוֹי אֶל הַר הָעֵבְרִים,
20 וַיִּמַּת שָׁם, בְּנִשְׁיַקַּת אֲדִיר הָאֲדִירִים.
וַיִּקְבֹּר אֹתוֹ בְּמַרְדְּרוֹר, מְקוֹם אֲבָקַת עֶפְרַיִם.
כִּי מִי כַּמֶּשֶׁה מְכֹל־הַיְצוּרִים?
יִדְעוּ יוֹי פְּנִים אֶל פְּנִים מְאִירִים.
בְּרֵאשִׁית וְאַלְהָה שְׁמוֹת קְרָא, וְדַבֵּר – אֱלֹהֵי הַדְּבָרִים.
25 אֵיךְ יִמְתַּק, בְּהִבְדָּל אֹרוֹ, אֹר שְׁנֵי אוֹרִים?
קוֹל לְפָנָיו קְרָא: "פִּתְחוּ שְׁעָרִים!
יְבֹא זֶד, נֶאֱצַל מִבֵּין שְׁנֵי הַמְּאוֹרִים!"
יְדִידִי, קִדְּשׁוּ לְאֵל, הַבְּחַר לוֹ מִבְּחוֹרִים,
בְּשִׁלּוֹשׁ "קְדוּשׁ", בְּמִהְלֵל וְשִׁירִים,
30 קַהֵל: יֵשֵׁב עַל כֶּסֶם, מְהִדָּר בְּהִדְרִים.

יחי ראובן
וזאת ליהודה:
וללוי
10
[ובנימין
וליוסף
וזבולון
[ויששכר
15 וגד
ודן
ונפתלי
ואשר

חזן: יֵשֶׁב עַל־כִּסֵּא רָם וְנִשְׂא וְשׁוֹלֵיו מְלֵאִים אֶת־הַהֵיכָל: שְׂרָפִים עֹמְדִים | מִמַּעַל לֹו שֵׁשׁ כְּנָפִים
שֵׁשׁ כְּנָפִים לְאֶחָד בְּשֵׁתִים | יִכְסֶה פָּנָיו וּבְשֵׁתִים יִכְסֶה רַגְלָיו וּבְשֵׁתִים יַעֲוֹפֶף: וְקָרָא זֶה אֶל־זֶה
וְאָמַר

קהל: קְדוֹשׁ קְדוֹשׁ קְדוֹשׁ יְיָ צְבָאוֹת מְלֵא כָּל־הָאָרֶץ כְּבוֹדֹ: (ישעיהו ו:א-ג)

חילופי נוסחאות

- 11 כל השורה: ד: אחר שורה 16; תיקנונו ע"פ ו וע"פ סדר הפסוקים במקרא.
14 כל השורה: ד: אחר שורה 11 (שהיא אחר שורה 16); תיקנונו ע"פ ו וע"פ סדר הפסוקים במקרא.
27 מבין שני המאורים. מ: נ"א מבין מאורים.
30 ישב. מ, מוסיפים בראש השורה: ואמרו בפחד ומורא.

Draft

Parashath Vezoth Habberakha

Structure: Monorhymed; many lines begin with the names of Tribes of Israel, taken from verses in the *parasha*.

Acrostic: Aharon (in the opening letters of the first four lines)

Introduction

This poem is relatively long, 176 words, and *Parashath Vezoth Ha-berakha* is extremely short—at 512 words, it is the shortest *parasha* in the Torah. Therefore, our poet is able to cover everything in the *parasha*. This is appropriate, for this is the last *parasha* in the Torah, and it is fitting to give it full dignity. The *parasha* contains two sections: Moses's blessing of the Tribes of Israel, in Deuteronomy 33, and the narrative of Moses's death, in Deuteronomy 34. When Moses blesses the Tribes, each verse begins with the name of the Tribe, usually as the first word of the verse but occasionally as the second. Our poet has copied this format; we have indicated it visually, by setting off to the right the initial word or two words of each of these lines.

Conspicuously absent from this list of the Tribes of Israel, in both the *parasha* and the *piyyut*, is Simeon. Aaron ben Joseph writes in *Sefer Ha-mivhar* on Deuteronomy 33:1:

Those who explain that Moses left Simeon without a blessing because of Zimri ben Salu [the chieftain of Simeon, who had public sexual relations with the daughter of a Midianite chieftain in Numbers 25:6] are not correct [....] Rather, [because] Jacob our Father blessed only twelve Tribes, [...] and Moses saw fitting [...] to bless the Tribe of Levi, for they offer Israel's sacrifices, and through them are all Israel blessed, and atoned from sin; [therefore, so that there would not be thirteen tribes blessed, he] included Simeon along with [Levi], for Jacob had called Simeon and Levi "brothers" [Genesis 49:5]. And although [Jacob said]: *I will divide them in Jacob, and disperse them in Israel* [Genesis 49:7], [nonetheless], when all Israel is blessed, Simeon is blessed among them—for how can one Tribe of Israel be erased?

After the blessings of the Tribes, Aaron ben Joseph paraphrases the narrative of Moses's death, and he tells of Moses's greatness: he knew God face to face, and gave us the Torah, and was more noble than the sun and the moon. When he died, the gates of heaven opened to let him in. And now, having finished this poem, let us praise God with the *qedusha* verse of Isaiah 6:3: *Holy, holy, holy is Adonai Zeva'oth* [....]

Parashath Vezoth Habberakha
Third qedusha (Qadosh Qadosh)

The man of God¹ blessed the chosen tribes of Jeshurun.
Behold, his mouth and tongue precipitated rain of rebuke and dew
of blessing.
The first of his words was “Adonai”, who “came from Sinai”, in
splendor and beauty,
And gave the Torah as an inheritance to His people—righteousness
and justice and uprightness.
5 Moses blessed, yea, blessed, His dear children.
May Reuben live, and not die, like those that go astray,
And may his men not belost, such that they would be uncountable.
And this for Judah: May Adonai be a help for him, from foes.
And regarding Levi he said: The bearer of Tummim and Urim,
10 May he crush the loins of his foes, and may those who stray not
stand up [again].
And Benjamin, God’s beloved, dwells in God’s pure dwelling places,
And regarding Joseph he said: May his land be blessed, and his is the right of the
firstborn.
And Zebulun shall rejoice in flowing rivers of honey,
And Issachar in his tents, with insight in studies.
15 And Gad will dwell like a lion, and tear prey as whelps do.
And Dan like a lion’s whelp, dominate among the mighty
And Naphtali will be satiated with contentment, lacking nothing.
And Asher, blessed among the sons—may he be favored among his brothers,
the fit.
Now Adonai’s prophet ascended to Mount Abarim,
20 And he died there, from the kiss of the noblest of the noble.²
And He buried him there, in pure musk, instead of dust.
For who is like Moses, out of all creations?
Adonai knew him, face to shining face.
Genesis and Exodus he called out, and he spoke these words.
25 When separated from his light, how can the light of the two
[heavenly] luminaries be sweet?
A voice calls out before him: “Open the gates!
Let the pure one come, the one more ennobled out of the two
luminaries!”
My friends, declare the sanctity of God, who chose him out of the
chosen ones,

¹ **The man of God.** Moses.

² **The noblest of the noble.** God.

Draft

With the threefold “Holy!”, with praise and songs,
30 Cong. The one seated on the throne, glorified in beauty.

Cantor. [He is] seated on a throne, high and lofty, with His coattails filling the Temple. Seraphim were standing above Him, each one with six wings; with two [wings] they would cover their faces, and with two they would cover their legs, and with two they would fly. And they would call out, this one to that one, and say:

Congregation: **Holy, holy, holy is Adonai Zeva’oth; the entire world is full of His Glory.**
(Isa. 6:1–3)

Commentary

- 1 The man of God blessed the chosen tribes of Jeshurun.
- 2 Behold, his mouth and tongue precipitated rain of rebuke and dew of blessing.
- 3 The first of his words was “Adonai”, who “came from Sinai”, in splendor and beauty,
- 4 And gave the Torah as an inheritance to His people—righteousness and justice and uprightness.
- 5 Moses blessed, yea, blessed, His dear children.

1 **The man of God blessed.** Deuteronomy 33:1, the opening verse of our *parasha*: *Now this is the blessing that Moses, the man of God, blessed the Israelites, before his death.*

Chosen. Hebrew *berurim*, which could also be translated as “pure”. Because the Israelites are called “chosen” many times in Scripture (e.g. Deuteronomy 4:37), we have decided to translate *berurim* in accordance with this meaning.

Tribes of Jeshurun. “Jeshurun” is a rare Biblical name for the people of Israel; it appears in the Biblical poetry at the end of Deuteronomy, 32:15 (*Ha’azinu*) and 33:5, 26 (*Ve’zoth Habberakha*), and also once in Isaiah (44:2). The phrase “Tribes of Jeshurun” (*shivṭé yeshurun*) is not Biblical, but it is old in Hebrew literature. It appears once in the Babylonian Talmud, Yoma 73b, where Rav Aḥa bar Jacob says that this phrase was inscribed on the high priest’s breastplate, and it appears in the early Rabbanite confessional prayer for Yom Kippur, “Atta Hivdalta Enosh Me-rosh” (Birnbaum, *Yom Kippur*, p. 597).

2 **Behold, his mouth and tongue precipitated rain of rebuke and dew of blessing.** Speech is compared to rain and dew at the opening of the song “Ha’azinu”: *May my teaching pour like rain, may my speech drip like dew* (Deuteronomy 32:2). It is reasonable to compare a speech of rebuke to rain, for rain is sometimes destructive, but a speech of blessing to dew, for dew is always beneficial. Compare the Babylonian Talmud, Ta’anith 4a.

3 **The first of his words was “Adonai,” who “came from Sinai”.** Deuteronomy 33:2: *And he said: Adonai came from Sinai [...]*

In splendor and beauty. This probably describes God’s descent upon Sinai, not Moses’s speech.

4 **Righteousness and justice and uprightness.** Proverbs 1:3.

5 **His dear children.** We have spelled “His” with a capital H, understanding that the Israelites are God’s children, as they are called many places in Scripture.

Alternatively, the poem might be calling them Moses's children, for he invested so much time in taking care of them, like a parent.

- 5 Moses blessed, yea, blessed, His dear children.
6 May Reuben live, and not die, like those that go astray,
7 And may his men not be lost, such that they would be uncountable.
8 And this for Judah: May Adonai be a help for him, from foes.
9 And to Levi he said: The bearer of Tummim and Urim,
10 May he crush the loins of his foes, and may those who stray not stand up [again].

6 **Like those that go astray.** Literally, “like the death of those that go astray”.

7 **And may his men not be gone, such that they would be uncountable.** Literally, this means “and may his men not be gone, from [being] numbered”. The word *yippaqdu*, which we have translated as “gone”, also has a sense that means “counted”, but we have been unable to capture the pun in English. In any event, the line is a paraphrase of Deuteronomy 32:6: *May Reuben live, and not die, and may his men be of number*. Aaron ben Joseph, in *Sefér Ha-mivḥar* ad loc., explains “may his men be of number” as meaning that when Reuben's men come back from battle, their number should be the same as it was when they went into battle; he also mentions an opinion that the verse means *and not die, and may his men [not] be [few] in number*, where the word “not” distributes over the two clauses; this is Abraham ibn ‘Ezra's interpretation.

8 **And this for Judah: May Adonai be a help for him, from foes.** Deuteronomy 32:7: *And this for Judah: Hear, O Adonai, Judah's voice [...] and may You be a help from his foes.*

9 **And regarding Levi he said: The bearer of Tummim and Urim.** Deuteronomy 32:8: *And regarding Levi he said: Your Tummim and your Urim are for your pious man [...]* The Urim and Tummim are parts of the vestments of the high priest; see Exodus 28:15–30. For more information, see our commentary on the poem for *Ve'atta Tezavvé*, lines 13–14.

10 **May he crush the loins of his foes, and may those that stray not arise [again].** Deuteronomy 32:11 (continuation of the blessing to Levi): *Crush his foes at the loins, and his enemies from [being able to] rise [again]*. The poet replaces the word *enemies* for “those that stray”, for the purpose of the rhyme *-rim*; his assumption is that any enemies of Levi are sinners, who “stray” from the right path.

- 11 And Benjamin, God's beloved, dwells in God's pure dwelling-places,
12 And regarding Joseph he said: May his land be blessed, and his is the law of the birthright.
13 And Zebulun shall rejoice in flowing rivers of honey,

14 And Issachar in his tents, knowers of understanding in studies.

15 And Gad will dwell like a lion, and tear prey as whelps do.

11 **And Benjamin, God's beloved, dwells in God's pure dwelling places.** Alternatively: "And Benjamin, beloved of God, who dwells in God's pure dwelling-places" (i.e., God is the one that is dwelling, rather than the understanding reflected in our translation, that Benjamin is the one that is dwelling). In any event, the line is based on Deuteronomy 32:12: *To Benjamin he said: beloved of God, who dwells over [Benjamin] with security [...]* In *Sefer Ha-mivhar* ad loc., Aaron ben Joseph gives two possible explanations of this verse: (a) it refers to God's Glory, the *kavod*, the physical manifestation of His presence, which dwelt in Benjamin's territory, for the Temple was there; or (b) it is to be translated *The beloved of God dwells over [Benjamin] with security*, and refers to King Solomon, known also as Jedidiah (II Samuel 12:25), literally, "God's beloved", whose palace was in Benjamin's territory and who thus protected the Tribe of Benjamin.

Note that in the Venice printing, line 11 follows line 16, and line 14 follows line 11; we have changed the order of the lines in accordance with the Vilna printing, which follows the order of the verses in the Biblical text.

12 **And to Joseph he said: May his land be blessed, and his is the right of the firstborn.** Deuteronomy 32:13: *And to Joseph he said: his land is blessed of Adonai [...]*

His is the right of the firstborn. In Genesis 48:22, Jacob gives Joseph a double portion, which is normally allotted to the firstborn; according to I Chronicles 1:5, this portion was officially that of the firstborn, even though Joseph was not the first of Jacob's sons. Our poet uses the words "his is the right of the firstborn", taken from Deuteronomy 21:17, adapted only inasmuch as necessary for the rhyme; this is somewhat ironic, for that passage forbids a polygamous man to take the birthright from the son of his hated wife and give it to the son of his beloved wife—yet this is exactly what Jacob did when giving the birthright to Joseph.

13 **Flowing rivers of honey.** Literally, this means "honey of flowing of rivers", an inverted *semikhuth* (see index of rhetorical devices), which the poet uses for the sake of the rhyme.

14 **And Issachar in his tents.** Deuteronomy 33:18: *Rejoice, O Zebulun, in your goings-out; and Issachar, in your tents.*

With insight in studies. I Chronicles I 12:33: *And of the Issacharites, with insight about the times, to know what Israel should do [...]* The implication seems to be that the Issacharites were scholars; this idea appears also in Rabbanite tradition, in Babylonian Talmud Yoma 26a.

15 **And Gad will dwell like a lion, and tear prey as whelps do.** *And to Gad he said: [...] he dwells like a lion, and tears [his victim's] arms and skull.*

16 And Dan, like a lion's whelp, dominate among the mighty!

17 And Naphtali will be satiated with contentment, withlacking nothing.

18 And Asher, blessed among the sons—may he be favored among his brothers, the fit.

16 **Like a lion's whelp.** Deuteronomy 33:22: *Dan is a lion's whelp [...]* The word for whelp in this line, *gur*, taken from the verse in the *parasha*, is different from the word for whelps in the previous line, *kefirim*.

Dominate among the mighty. An imperative, addressed directly to Dan. The language is from the Song of Deborah, Judges 5:13: *O Adonai, dominate (yerad) for me among the mighty!* Our translation “dominate” for *yerad* is based on Aaron ben Joseph's commentary on the verse in Judges, where he reads the word as a jussive *pi'el* form of the root R-D-Y.

17 **And Naphtali will be satiated with contentment.** Deuteronomy 33:23: *And to Naphtali he said: Naphtali is satiated with contentment, and full of Adonai's blessing [...]*

18 **And Asher, blessed among the sons—may he be favored among his brothers, the fit.** Deuteronomy 33:24: *And to Asher he said: Blessed among the sons is Asher; may he be favored among his brothers [...]*

19 Now Adonai's prophet ascended to Mount Abarim,

20 And he died there, from the kiss of the most Mighty of all mighty.

21 And He buried him there, in pure musk, instead of dust.

22 For who is like Moses, out of all creations?

23 Adonai knew him, face to shining face.

19 **Mount Abarim.** Literally, this means “the mountain of the land across”, an alternate name for Mount Nebo, found in Numbers 27:12 and Deuteronomy 32:49.

20 **And he died there, from the kiss.** In *Sefer Ha-mivhar* on Deuteronomy 34:5, Aaron ben Joseph writes: “It is correct that [Moses] died from a kiss; and [the meaning of] this is a big secret.” It is unclear exactly what philosophical secret Aaron ben Joseph is concealing. However, the idea that Moses died from a kiss is an old Rabbinic one: it appears in the Babylonian Talmud, Bava Bathra 17a, where it means that “the angel of death had no power over Moses” but rather, God personally took his life away. In another passage in the Babylonian Talmud, Berakhoth 8a, it is stated

that death by kiss is the least painful way to die and feels like pulling a single strand of hair out of milk.

21 **Pure musk.** Hebrew *mor deror*, one of the spices used in the oil for anointing the priests, in Exodus 23:3; our translation “musk” follows Aaron ben Joseph’s explanation in *Sefer Ha-mivhar* ad loc. The line in the poem presents imagery that suggests that Moses’s death and burial were like that of no one else; for unlike everyone else, who is buried in earth, Moses was buried in fragrant spices.

23 **Adonai knew him, face to shining face.** Deuteronomy 34:10: *And no prophet again arose in Israel like Moses, whom God knew face to face.* The idea that God’s presence shines with light appears in many places in Scripture, such as Deuteronomy 33:2, at the opening of our *parasha*: *He shone forth from Se’ir*; correspondingly, we read in Exodus 34:29 ff. that Moses’s face shone rays of light after he spoke with God.

24 Genesis and Exodus he called out, and he spoke these words.

25 When separated from his light, how can the light of the two [heavenly] luminaries be sweet?

26 A voice calls out before him: “Open the gates!

27 Let the pure one come, the one more ennobled out of the two luminaries!”

24 **Genesis and Exodus he called out, and he spoke these words.** The words in this line, after “Genesis and Exodus”, are puns on the names of the other books of the Torah in Hebrew. Leviticus is *Vayyiqra*, literally, “he called out”, and Numbers is often *Vaydabber*, “he spoke” (though today it is more often *Bemidbar*, “in the wilderness”), and Deuteronomy is *Ellé Ha-devarim*, “these are the words”. The implication of the line is that Moses spoke the words of the entire Torah.

25 **Two [heavenly] luminaries.** The sun and the moon.

27 **More ennobled out of the two luminaries.** This line seems to be saying, like the phrase two lines above, that Moses is more noble than the brightness of the sun or the moon. However, if so, the terminology “ennobled out of the two luminaries” is a bit awkward; it is possible that the two luminaries stand here for Moses and Aaron, of whom Moses is the more noble one. A variant text, preserved by the marginal annotator of a copy of the Venice printing (see introduction), leaves out the word “two” and reads merely *mi-ben me’orim*, “out of luminaries”, this may mean that Moses’s soul was more ennobled, more pure, than that of any of the other prophets.

28 My friends, declare the sanctity of God, who chose him out of the chosen ones,

29 With the threefold “Holy!”, with praise and songs,

30 The one seated on the throne, glorified in beauty.

28 **Who chose him out of the chosen ones.** The entire Israelite nation is called chosen, throughout Scripture; and Moses, specifically, is called *His chosen one*, in Psalms 106:23.

29 **The threefold “Holy!”**. The recitation of “Holy, holy, holy” in the *qedusha*-verse that follows the poem.

30 **The One seated on the throne.** A variant text, preserved by the abovementioned marginal annotator and by the Vilna printing, adds three words to the beginning of this line: *Ve-’imru be-fahad u-mora*, “And say, in dread and fear”; accordingly, this line would be a call to say the actual words “the One seated on the throne” (in the Biblical verse immediately following the poem), rather than just to praise the One who is seated on the throne.

Glorified in beauty. The verb here translated “glorified” is from the same root as the noun “beauty”, and thus this is an example of *figura etymologica*. A more literal translation would be “beautified with beauty.”