



Simchat Torah flags from different eras. These have become collectors' items. The Land of Israel Museum recently had an exhibit of ST flags, and scholars are interested in they depicted facets of Jewish historical experience.

**דברים ל"ג:א'** וְנָאֵת הַבְּרָכָה אֲשֶׁר בֵּרַךְ מֹשֶׁה אִישׁ הָאֱלֹקִים אֶת־בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל לִפְנֵי מוֹתוֹ:

**Deuteronomy 33:1** *This is the blessing with which Moses, the man of God, bade the Israelites farewell before he died.* Moses offers this blessing of his own volition. Nowhere does God command him to do this as He did with the Song of Moses in the previous chapter. That passage was unusually harsh. Moses cannot let that poem be his last message to the people. His last words will be words of blessing.

**ל"ג:ד'** תּוֹרָה צִוְּהָ לָנוּ מֹשֶׁה מִרְשָׁה קְהֵלֶת יִשְׂרָאֵל:

**33:4** *When Moses charged us with the Teaching As the heritage of the congregation of Jacob.*

According to the Talmud, this is one of the first verses taught to children (Sukkah 32a). *As soon as a child learns to speak, says the Talmud, the father should teach the child 'Torah' and the 'Shma'.* According to Rabbi Hamnuna, *teach the child 'Torah' means, teach the child this verse that begins with the word, Torah: Torah, Moses commanded us...* When a child becomes self-aware he or she asks, "Where did I come from?" When a Jewish child becomes Torah-aware, he or she asks, "Where did the Torah come from?" This verse is the simple answer. Thus, you are aware from the moment you know how to speak that you are a member of this people, and that the Torah belongs to you because it was given by Moses.

**ל"ד:א'** וַיַּעַל מֹשֶׁה מֵעַרְבַת מוֹאָב אֶל־הַר נְבוֹ רֹאשׁ הַפְּסִגָּה אֲשֶׁר עַל־פְּנֵי יַרְדֵּן וַיִּרְאֶהוּ ה' אֶת־כָּל־הָאָרֶץ אֶת־הַגְּלִיל עַד־דָּן:

**Deuteronomy 34:1** *Moses went up from the steppes of Moab to Mount Nebo, to the summit of Pisgah, opposite Jericho, and the LORD showed him the whole land: Gilead as far as Dan...* Mount Nebo has about the same elevation as an average Adirondack. Or think of it as almost twice the elevation of Masada. If you've tried hiking up one of those, you better be in decent shape otherwise, you're going to feel it. Moses makes it up the mountain, a testament to his physical vigor. God shows him the far north of the land the central north, the central south and then finally the south. Recall that when Abraham separates from Lot (Gen. 13:14) God tells him to cast *his eyes and look to the north, the south, the east, and the west.* אֲשֶׁר נָא עֵינָיו וַיִּרְאֶה מִן־הַמְּקוֹם אֲשֶׁר־אָתָּה שָׁם צַפְנָה וְנִגְבָּה וְקִדְמָה וְיָמָה: Abraham was standing in the middle of the land; Moses outside of it. Abraham was looking in generic directions; Moses was looking at tribal territories. Abraham stood alone but God was with Moses and acted as his guide. Not having permission to enter the land was a bitter reality for Moses. God acting as his personal guide serves as comfort. How do we feel when we read this verse? On the one hand, this is the IMAX moment, Moses is getting the panoramic view of the land with the Ultimate Tour-Guide

showing it to him. On the other hand, he is finally resigned that he will not be going there. Is he accepting of this or resentful? Does God comfort him or act indifferently to Moses in this instant? Permit some close attention to textual detail: when God promises the land to Abraham He says, לך אתננה וְלִבְנֵיךָ עַד-עוֹלָם: *I give it to you and your children forever*; here quotes His promise to A, I, and J saying *I give it to your (A, I, and J's) children*. For his whole life, Moses has been a part of this people and yet, by necessity, he is also somewhat detached from them; he is similar and also differentiated. He is of the same stock, but he is also distinct. And while we know he has two sons, they are not present with him at his death (unlike when Aaron died, at least one son was with him to receive the transfer of the priesthood). Moses' consolation is that God is with him. What more could he want? Maybe he wants his family too? This moment, while denying him a satisfying personal objective, fulfills an ultimate aspiration of his – God is with him. God's last word to him is a commandment. God is being God. In death, Moses fulfills God's final commandment to him. Moses is being Moses.

לִידֵהוּ וְנִמְתָּ שָׁם מֹשֶׁה עֶבְד־ה' בְּאֶרֶץ מוֹאָב עַל-פִּי ה': **34:5** *So Moses the servant of God died there, in the land of Moab, at the command of the LORD.* At his death he is not simply Moses. He is **Moses, Servant of God**. His transformation from that to **Moshe Rabbenu (Moses our Rabbi)** at the hands of the rabbis, is one of the greatest and most audacious re-brandings of all time! Here the Torah says he belongs to God. But throughout rabbinic literature the Rabbis are basically saying, *Nope, he belongs to us*. God attends personally to Moses' burial. Moses may be God's servant in life but God serves Moses' final needs in death.

לִידֵהוּ וּמֹשֶׁה בְּרִמְאָה וְעֵשְׂרִים שָׁנָה בְּמָתוֹ לֹא-כִהְתָּה עֵינָיו וְלֹא-גָם לָהֶם: **34:7** *Moses was a hundred and twenty years old when he died; his eyes were undimmed and his vigor unabated.* Moses lives the perfect span of years. 1x2x3x4x5 years. R. Alter translates this as *his sap had not fled*. Others: *vigor, vitality*. J. Tigay says that *he did not become wrinkled*. He did not present the usual signs of old age. (Perhaps because he always covered his face, he was never exposed to UV radiation and therefore never suffered skin damage as a result!)

לִידֵהוּ וַיְהוּשַׁע בֶּן-נּוּן מְלֵא רוּחַ חָכְמָה כִּי-סָמַךְ מֹשֶׁה אֶת-יָדָיו עָלָיו וַיִּשְׁמְעוּ אֵלָיו בְּנֵי-יִשְׂרָאֵל וַיַּעֲשׂוּ כְּאֲשֶׁר צִוָּה ה' אֶת-מֹשֶׁה: **34:9** *Now Joshua son of Nun was filled with the spirit of wisdom because Moses had laid his hands upon him; and the Israelites heeded him, doing as the LORD had commanded Moses.* You got to wonder what was going through Joshua's mind at this moment. The fact that they listen to him amounts to nothing less than a blessing of generosity and a presumption of grace. Without it, they would not have been able to move through this sensitive and also, perilous moment.

לִידֵהוּ וְלֹא-קָם נָבִיא עוֹד בְּיִשְׂרָאֵל כְּמֹשֶׁה אֲשֶׁר יָדָעוּ ה' פָּנִים אֶל-פָּנִים:

**Deuteronomy 34:10** *Never again did there arise in Israel a prophet like Moses—whom the LORD knew face to face... Moses did not know God face to face. But God knew Moses face to face.*

לִידֵהוּ וְלֹכְלֵ הַיָּד הַחֲזָקָה וְלִכְלֵ הַמּוֹרָא הַגָּדוֹל אֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה מֹשֶׁה לְעֵינֵי כָּל-יִשְׂרָאֵל:

**34:12** *and for all the great might and awesome power that Moses displayed before all Israel.*

The Torah ends by making reference to the things that Moses **did** that Israel **saw**. But Torah endures because of the things that Moses **said** that Israel **heard**.

The Torah ends with five word-pairs:

- his eyes were undimmed and his vigor unabated – לֹא-כִהְתָּה עֵינָיו וְלֹא-גָם לָהֶם
- signs and wonders – הָאֵתָּה וְהַמוֹפְתִים
- the land of Egypt and all his land – בְּאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם וְלִכְלֵ-אֶרֶצוֹ
- Pharaoh and his servants – לְפָרְעֹה וְלִכְלֵ-עַבְדָּיו
- the strong arm and great wonder – הַיָּד הַחֲזָקָה הַמּוֹרָא הַגָּדוֹל

And starts with five word-pairs:

- heaven and earth – שָׁמַיִם וָאָרֶץ
- formless and void – תְּהוֹ וְנָהוּ
- light and darkness – אֹר וְחָשֶׁךְ
- day and night – יוֹם וָלַיְלָה
- and
- evening and morning – עָרֶב וּבֹקֵר

Destiny or coincidence? Intention or accident? Deep structure or – what's with all this obsession with word-pairs?

*Hazak Hazak – Venithazek!*

**חזק חזק – ונתחזק!**

