



The Collective Conversation

Weekly Torah Essays from the
Young Israel of Scarsdale Community



Sefer Devarim

Parshat Vezot HaBracha

Tishrei 5783 / October 2022

Vezot HaBracha and Freudenfreude

By Ruthie Schwartz

If you get a little teary at the end of *Sefer Devarim* while reading of *Moshe's* death, you are not alone. According to *Rabbi Simeon (Bava Batra 15a)* the last few verses of *Vzot HaBracha* were written by *Moshe b'dimah*, with tears in his eyes. *Bnei Yisrael* also cried for thirty days after his death.

It is natural for us to feel profound sadness upon the death of a hero. Think King Lear. Think Sydney Carton at the end of *A Tale of Two Cities*. Here, in the last chapter of the *Chumash*, is our beloved *Moshe* meeting his end. Our *Moshe*, whom we have known from infancy in his little basket on the Nile. Our *Moshe*, whom we have followed from

It is natural for us to feel profound sadness upon the death of a hero. Think King Lear. Think Sydney Carton at the end of A Tale of Two Cities. Here, in the last chapter of the Chumash, is our beloved Moshe meeting his end.

confrontations with *Pharoah*, through the exodus, the revelation, the years in the wilderness, and now, finally, to the entrance to *Eretz Yisrael*. Our *Moshe* who has championed his people despite their constant complaints, their obstinacy, their stubbornness, their rebelliousness, and their jealousies. How profoundly sad that this hero's greatest wish, his dream of entering the land of Israel, was denied him. We, too, are emotionally moved—*b'dimah*.

But a closer reading of the text may lead us in another direction. Looking back at the first *pasuk* of our *parsha* we see a phrase never before used to describe *Moshe*—אִישׁ הָאֱלֹקִים (34:1) *Moshe* is also described as the most humble of all men, and an עֶבֶד־ה' a *servant of God* (34:5). His relationship with God was unique. The *parsha* continues,

וְלֹא־קָם נָבִיא עוֹד בְּיִשְׂרָאֵל כְּמֹשֶׁה אֲשֶׁר יָדְעוּ הֵי פָנָיו אֶל־פָּנָיו:

*Never again did there arise in Israel a prophet like Moses—
whom Hashem singled out, face to face (34:10)*

But it is in that very first *pasuk* of the *parsha* before *Moshe* blesses the people that he is described as a *man of God*—אִישׁ הָאֱלֹקִים.

Rabbi Shalom Rosner, in his work *Shalom Rav: Insights in the Weekly Parsha*, quotes the *Otzrot Hatorah* who suggests that a true *man of God* is someone who can truly and sincerely be happy for someone else's success even when he does not share in their good fortune. Picture the scene: *Moshe* is standing at the Jordan River with the Jewish people who are ready to

conclude their journey to the promised land—a portion of the trip that he while he will not make. And yet, in the tradition of *Yaakov Avinu*, he is still able to bless each and every one of the people, tribe by tribe. *Moshe* demonstrates an ability to rise above his own heartache in an almost superhuman manner—and that is precisely why he is called *ish ha'elokim*. It would have been understandable for *Moshe* to be resentful, jealous, and questioning why everyone except for him would reach *Eretz Yisrael*. Instead, at this moment, with great nobility and love, he delivers *brachot*--he blesses the tribes and is truly is happy for them.

What an amazing way to close out the five books of the Torah! What a profound message we are left with! *Moshe Rabbeinu* stands as the paradigm—the *ish ha'elokim*—who can be happy for other people and go as far as blessing them, despite his own situation. It is easy to be happy for others when things are going your way. It is also easy to commiserate with others during hard times. But our ultimate goal—a lesson to be learned from our *parsha*—should be to be like *Moshe Rabbeinu*, sincerely happy when others are experiencing good fortune.

As I pondered this concept, I Googled in search of an antonym of *schadenfreude* (German meaning deriving joy from the struggle of others). To my surprise, I discovered the term *freudenfreude* which means taking joy in other people's successes. But as I type these sentences, I discovered—sadly—that, while Microsoft Word recognizes *schadenfreude*, the term *freudenfreude* is underlined in a red squiggly line, indicating that it is a typo or an error.

We can aspire to a day when like *Moshe*, we can experience and recognize *freudenfreude*, a day when it is as common as *schadenfreude*.

And so, the tears are genuine as we bid farewell to the noblest and most selfless of men. But on the heels of this finale is *Sefer Breishit* and the beginning of a new cycle, which brings with it great rejoicing and the true *simcha* of Torah.

As I pondered this concept, I Googled in search of an antonym of schadenfreude (German meaning deriving joy from the struggle of others). To my surprise, I discovered the term freudenfreude which means taking joy in other people's successes. But as I type these sentences, I discovered—sadly—that, while Microsoft word recognizes schadenfreude, the term freudenfreude is underlined in a red squiggly line, indicating that it is a typo or an error.

Ruthie and David Schwartz (a life long member of the Young Israel of Scarsdale) feel deeply connected to the YIS community and thank the congregation for being a home away from home for their whole family, Sam (16), Zack (13), Jordana (11) and Max (4 months). Ruthie and David wish everyone a good Shabbos and a Chag Sameach.

Contact Steve Smith at stevenjsmith@yahoo.com to write a dvar Torah for the parsha of your choice

The Collective Conversation is a project of the Young Israel of Scarsdale and the YIS Living Torah Fund

Learning and Growing Together as a Community • Learning as Legacy

[Click here](#) to see past issues of *The Collective Conversation*