

R' Bachya ben Asher z"l (Spain; 1255-1340) writes: Because this book [*Devarim*] is the fifth and last of the *chumashim* of the Torah, I would like to enlighten you regarding the arrangement of the books--why they were arranged in this order in the Torah. It is well known that even though there are five books, they are all part of one structure.

The Torah begins with *Bereishit* because the fact that the world was created is the foundation of *emunah* / belief. Through belief in Creation, one comes to an understanding of *Hashem's hashgachah* / providence, and from there one can understand reward and punishment. Because these are the essential principles of the Torah, the book of *Bereishit* describes Creation, *Hashem's hashgachah* over mankind, the fact that man was given some affirmative and negative commandments, his reward of being placed in *Gan Eden*, his punishment of being expelled from *Gan Eden*, and the flood--which is testimony to Creation, *Hashem's hashgachah*, and the concept of reward and punishment.

Next is the book of *Shmot*, which demonstrates the *Yichud* / Oneness of *Hashem*, a belief which the Patriarchs propagated and which a person comes to through belief in Creation.

Next is *Vayikra*, the book of the *korbanot* / sacrificial offerings. As is known, the *korbanot*--from the Hebrew root that means "to draw close"--further the *Yichud*. [This is a *kabbalistic* concept R' Bachya discusses in his commentary to *Vaykira* 1:9. In any event, R' Bachya's comment highlights the importance of the *korbanot*.]

Next is *Bemidbar*, whose subject is *Eretz Yisrael*, the primary place for bringing *korbanot*.

Finally, there is the book of *Devarim*, the climax of which is the prophecy regarding the Future Redemption, which is found at the end of this book. That is the primary time of settling *Eretz Yisrael*, not the relatively short periods of the First and Second Temples.

Memoirs

R' Yaakov Halevi Lifschutz z"l (1838-1921) was the long-time secretary to R' Yitzchak Elchanan Spektor z"l (1817-1896; rabbi of Kovno), who was one of the leading halachic authorities of the second half of the 19th century as well as a spokesman and lobbyist for Russian Jewry in the Czar's court. Through his position, R' Lifschutz was a witness to, and a participant in, many important events of that era. His memoirs are entitled "*Zichron Yaakov*." He writes:

Many people today complain or shake their heads at the state of *tzedakah* among our nation, viewing those who ask for charity as highwaymen who hold up other people. They come with demands. They bang on doors, the doors swing on their hinges day and night, and the collectors come like creditors with all kinds of demands and stories: about *Eretz Yisrael*; this-or-that *yeshiva*; victims of a fire; people expelled from their homes; marrying off an orphan; clothing for poor school-children; a teacher or laborer in the neighborhood who is ill, but still must provide for a wife and children; a wagon-driver whose horse dropped dead; a widow with six children in her care; Torah study; bread for the poor; wood for the homes of paupers; food for *Pesach*; impoverished women who have given birth; kosher food for laborers; a woman and children whose husband and father has been drafted into the army; a collector from such-and-such *yeshiva*; a native of Yerushalayim who is collecting in the diaspora for holy matters in *Eretz Yisrael*; an author with his books; a would-be author who wants to write a book; a traveling preacher--this one comes and this one goes. The homeowner feels like he is being looted, and he flees from his house to seek refuge in the *bet midrash*, his ears ringing with the clanging of the coins in the collection boxes. . . On a fast day, the confusion and commotion are even greater . . .

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in memory of his mother

Pessel bat Naftali Sternheim Lewin a"h

"Food you shall sell me for money as provisions, and I will eat; and you will give me water for money, and I shall drink -- only let me pass with my foot-goers. As the children of Esav who dwell in Se'ir did for me, and the Moabites who dwell in Ar . . ." (2:28-19)

R' Ovadiah of Bartenura z"l (15th century; Italy and *Eretz Yisrael*; author of the *mishnah* commentary known by his name) asks: In our verse, Moshe Rabbeinu says expressly that the Moabites provided food to *Bnei Yisrael*. Yet, we read later (23:5), "An Ammonite or Moabite shall not enter the congregation of *Hashem*, even their tenth generation shall not enter the congregation of *Hashem*, to eternity, because of the fact that they did not greet you with bread and water on the road when you were leaving Egypt!"

R' Ovadiah explains: The Moabites did sell food to *Bnei Yisrael*. However, the Moabites were our cousins, descendants of Lot, the nephew of Avraham Avinu. As such, they should have greeted us on the road with free food. Because of their lack of compassion for their own relatives, they are unfit to marry into the Jewish People. (*Amar Naka*)

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The complainers don't know and don't understand, or they don't want to understand, that--putting aside the fact that no one ever became poor by giving charity--Judaism makes us all one family. The young and the old, the poor and the rich--we are brothers in the eyes of the Torah. Would anyone object if a poor brother came to his rich brother and said: "We have the same father and the same mother. Doesn't a brother save his brother who is in trouble?" If a shared house were collapsing, wouldn't those of lesser means justifiably ask those of greater means to strengthen the structure? . . .

Just as the one who helps should not feel haughty, so the one who asks need not feel humbled when he demands from his tight-fisted brother what is rightfully his according to the Torah. . .

Indeed, the *mitzvah* of *tzedakah* is as much in force as it ever was. This is what has preserved us until this day, and this is what will preserve us until [as we read in this week's *haftarah* (*Yeshayah* 1:27)], "Zion shall be redeemed with justice, and her returnees with charity."

... In prior generations, the home of a wealthy man who was learned would be a gathering place for sages. Even if the host was not learned, he would brag about the honor of having G-d-fearing people in his home, eating occasionally at his table. The poor were made to feel at home, and the wealthy did not have any feelings of superiority over them. Servants never said to guests who were shabbily dressed, "The master is not at home" or "He is too busy to see you."

"So I took the heads of your tribes, distinguished men, who were wise and well known, and I appointed them as heads over you, leaders of thousands, leaders of hundreds, leaders of fifties, and leaders of tens, and officers for your tribes." (1:15)

R' Yaakov Zvi Mecklenburg z"l (1785-1865; rabbi of Koenigsberg, Germany) writes in the name of the *Vilna Gaon* z"l: Each of these types of appointees had a different job. "Leaders of thousands" were army generals (see *Bemidbar* 31:4). "Leaders of hundreds" were judges. "Leaders of fifties" were teachers of Torah--twice as numerous as the judges because judgment is done only during the day, while Torah is studied night and day. Finally, "leaders of tens" were the police officers.

R' Mecklenburg adds: We read that Yitro advised Moshe Rabbeinu (*Shmot* 18:31), "You shall discern from among the entire people, men of strength, G-d-fearing people, men of truth, people who despise money, and you shall appoint them leaders of thousands, leaders of hundreds, leaders of fifties, and leaders of tens." "Men of strength" refers to the military leaders, "G-d-fearing people" refers to judges, "Men of truth" refers to teachers of Torah, *i.e.*, they study the Torah which is the ultimate truth, and "people who despise money" refers to police officers who cannot be bribed. (*Ha'ktav Ve'ha'hakabbalah*)



"They turned and ascended the mountain and came until the Valley of Eshkol, and spied it out. They took in their hands from the fruit of the Land and brought it down to us . . ." (1:24-25)

Why did the Spies bring samples of the fruits of *Eretz Yisrael* specifically from a valley?

R' Pinchas Halevi Ish Horowitz z"l (1731-1805; rabbi of Frankfurt, Germany, Talmud commentator, and early adherent of the *chassidic* movement) suggests: Our Sages teach that there was no mountain or hill in *Eretz Canaan* on which there was not an idol. Therefore, the Spies were concerned that fruit growing on a mountaintop might be an *asheirah* / a plant that had been worshiped. Accordingly, they took fruits from a valley.

(*Panim Yafot: Shelach*)

R' Aharon Lewin z"l Hy"d (1879-1941; rabbi of Rzeszow, Poland and member of the Polish parliament; killed in the Holocaust) offers another answer:

Halachah does not permit bringing *bikkurim* / the offering of the first fruits from a valley because fruits that grow in a valley are of inferior quality. Therefore, to support their claim that *Eretz Yisrael* was unsuitable, the Spies brought back "inferior" fruits, as if to say, "If the inferior fruit is so big that eight people are needed to carry a bunch of grapes, imagine how abnormal the good fruit is!" (*Ha'drash Ve'ha'iyun*)