

# DEVARIM

## ALIYA-BY-ALIYA SEDRA SUMMARY



**Rabbi Reuven Tradburks**  
Director of  
RCA Israel Region

The book of Devarim is Moshe's soliloquy in the last weeks of his life. A rather long soliloquy, the better part of 28 chapters. He has a lot to say.

He will not enter the Land of Israel. The Jewish people will. He has transferred leadership successfully: Aharon's successor is Elazar, Moshe's successor is Joshua. We have seen parting words before: Yaakov in Parshat Vayechi charged his sons. But not for 28 chapters. Yaakov's was one chapter of 33 verses. The English name for the book is Deuteronomy; the Midrash calls it Mishneh Torah. Both mean 2 – the second version of the Torah, or the repetition of the Torah. But those names are misleading.

Moshe does not review the *entire* Torah. He relates only *some* stories, reviewing with the people *some* of what has occurred earlier in the Torah. But he leaves out much more than he reviews. He does not mention any of the book of Breishit. Nor any of the story in Egypt; nothing of the slavery. Or the plagues. Or the splitting of the Sea. Or of the instructions for the Mishkan. Or most of the book of Vayikra relating to Tuma and Tahara and Offerings. So the review is not of the Torah; the review is of *some*, selected stories and laws of the Torah.

We are compelled to ask why Moshe chose these stories as we encounter them; and not others. And the order is not at all as they occurred; he changes the order. What's he getting at? What's driving Moshe? And as a last point of introduction. The language of Devarim is different. It is emotional. There is a lot of concern, of worry, of fear. Concern of failure, challenges that will be unmet, or met with failure. There is love: love of G-d for us and love of us for Him. Lots of zeal and passion; many emphatic forms. Moshe, in this departing speech, is sharing a lot of himself in a most revelatory fashion to the people from whom he is imminently departing.



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**1<sup>st</sup> aliya (Devarim 1:1-10)** Moshe related the events of the journey, the 11-day journey from Chorev to Kadesh Barnea. On 1 Shvat, year 40, Moshe related to the people all that G-d had instructed him about them. This was after the defeats of Sichon and Og, on the banks of the Jordan. He related: G-d instructed us to travel from Sinai and to

take the Land of Israel, the Land promised to the forefathers. And I said: these people are now so numerous that I cannot bear them alone.

It took 40 years to go on an 11-day journey. That is not very good mileage. Moshe begins his parting words with a description of the journey to the Land of Israel. Not with the story of the Exodus. Not even with the story of the giving of the Torah. His emphasis is the journey to the Land. The people are about to enter the Land; they are preoccupied with that. Moshe meets them where they are, addressing their immediate concerns. He'll get to speaking about Sinai and about religious belief and about religious challenges. But right now, let's connect with the issue at hand: entering the Land.



**2<sup>nd</sup> aliya (1:11-21)** Let's choose wise people to lead you. You agreed that this was a good idea.

Wise leaders were appointed over thousands, hundreds, tens and officers of enforcement as well. I charged the judges saying: listen and rule fairly without bias. I commanded you in all the things you are to do. We traveled the desert to the Mount of the Emori, Kadesh Barnea. There I said: let's go without fear and take the Land.

It is curious that the first story Moshe feels a need to review is the appointing of the various upper court and lower court judges. After all, it doesn't seem to have anything to do with the march to the Land. In fact, there are other stories that do occur as part of the march, like the complaints for water that are simply skipped. Why mention the

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appointment of judges? Perhaps Moshe is addressing the unspoken concern of the people; how in the world are we going to manage without the leadership of Moshe? We will not prevail in the battles without him. Moshe, subtly tempers his indispensability. I can't do it all. I couldn't do it all then; I needed help from the beginning. And now too. I am dispensable.



**3<sup>rd</sup> aliya (1:22-38)** You approached me to send spies to scout out the Land. I thought that

was a good idea, choosing the leaders of the tribes for the task. They toured and returned with fruits of the land exclaiming: The Land G-d is giving us is good. But you refused to go and rebelled against G-d saying: these have damaged our resolve telling us of the large people and the fortified cities. I insisted that G-d will fight the battle as He has done until now. But you did not trust in G-d Who has been guiding you by cloud and fire. You were told that all who do not believe they can enter the Land, will not enter the Land. And I too was told I would not enter; Yehoshua will lead the people into the Land.

Moshe is creating a bond with the people: I asked you for judges and you thought my idea was a good one. You asked me for spies and I thought your idea was a good

לע"נ" be TT from this issue of learning

**Rose Edith Cohen ע"ה**

איטה רייזל בת גנשא ואריה לייב הכהן ע"ה

ל"ג מנחם אב, on her 13th yearzeit,

*Missed very much by her daughters,*

*Janica Weinreb, Barbara Yasgur and*

*Benay Devora Cohen Neshar and families*

one. The differences in how Moshe relates this famous story of the spies and how the Torah itself described it is rich material for discussion. One of numerous differences is the role of the spies in this account: it's missing. Little is said of the spies. In Bamidbar it sounds like their bad report started a cascade of fear. Here, Moshe places the guilt on the people: based on the report of the spies, but clearly at the feet of the people. Perhaps Moshe is deliberately shifting emphasis from leaders to followers. You need good leaders: but you also need to be good followers. Blame for all national failures cannot be laid at the feet of the leaders. The people need to also bear full responsibility for their decisions. And here the decision of the people was to rebel against G-d.



**4<sup>th</sup> aliya (1:39-2:1)** Upon hearing that you would not enter the Land, you regretted your sin.

You said: let us go to the Land. But you were warned that G-d would not be with you in this and the Emori chased you away like bees to the region of Seir. We dwelt in Kadesh and Har Seir for a long time.

A foundational principle in the Jewish national journey is to follow our G-d. Man has plenty to do when the Divine instruction is absent. But when He tells us not to go to the Land, we will not prevail.



**5<sup>th</sup> aliya (2:2-30)** It was time to travel northward. Do not confront the descendants of your

brother Esav who dwell in Seir. Circle their land; pay for the food and water that you need from them. In addition, do not

confront Moav for it is the rightful possession of the descendants of Lot. Past the land of Moav is Amon; do not confront Amon for it too is the rightful possession of the descendants of Lot. The region north of the Arnon is the land of Sichon and Og; those lands I have given to you. I offered to Sichon to pass through his land, but he refused; G-d made him stubborn so that we could take his land.

The Jewish people are not alone in the world. We have relatives. And we are to give regard to those relatives. Yaakov's brother Esav settled in Seir. He deserves brotherly deference and hence, leave him alone. Moav and Amon are nations from Lot, Avraham's nephew. Leave them alone as well; they are your relatives. Brothers, even when pursuing entirely different legacies remain brothers nonetheless.



**6<sup>th</sup> aliya (2:31-3:14)** G-d told us to take the lands of Sichon in war.

The lands were conquered up to the Gilad. Og confronted us in the region toward the Bashan and he too was conquered. Their lands were given to Reuven, Gad and half the tribe of Menashe.

These confrontations with Sichon and Og are the last stories in the book of Bamidbar, not too long ago. Moshe relates these stories right at the beginning of his long speech, even though if he were reviewing our history chronologically they would have to wait 25 chapters. He does so to begin his long speech with success and with encouragement. He will want to warn the people, chastise them, tell them of their future failures: but that can all wait. Start

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positive.



7<sup>th</sup> **aliya (3:15-22)** The Lands on the east of the Jordan including the Gilad and the Lands from the Kineret to the Dead Sea were settled by Reuven and Gad and half of Menashe. I instructed these tribes to join the battle for the Land of Israel and then to return to their Lands.

This is a very large patch of Land: on the east side of the Jordan from the Dead Sea all the way up to the Hermon has been conquered and will be settled by the Jewish people. These early victories and Moshe's repetition of their stories allows Moshe to begin his long directives to the people on a high note, an optimistic one. You can and you will take the Land.

## HAFTORAH

### YESHAYAHU 1:1-27

This week's *haftorah* is the third of a series of three "*haftarot* of affliction." Yeshayahu conveys to the Jewish people of a G-dly vision he experienced, chastising the residents of Judah and Jerusalem for having rebelled against G-d. He criticized them for repeating their errors and not engaging in *teshuva*. "*Woe to a sinful nation, a people heavy with iniquity, evildoing seed, corrupt children. They forsook G-d; they provoked the Holy One of Israel.*" The navi employs harsh words by comparing the Jewish leaders to the rulers of Sodom and Gomorrah.

Yeshayahu then speaks gentler words,

## A SHORT VORT

BY RABBI CHANOCH YERES

Rav, Beit Knesset Beit Yisrael, Yemin Moshe

This Motzei Shabbat we will be sitting on the floor, wearing our non-leather footwear and chanting Megillat Eicha. In the second Pasuk it is written "Bacho Tivke BaLayla, V'Dimata al Lechaya."—"She weeps sore in the night, and her tears on her cheek."

Why does the text stress that the tears are on her cheek? Is it not obvious? Where else would tears be found? What is Jeremiah telling us?

Perhaps the meaning is that the tears are still found on her cheek, even now, never wiped away and never dried. As Rashi points out "Because she is always crying."

Other nations celebrate their victories but do not commemorate their sad days. We as a people never let our tears dry. Even at a wedding we recite the words "If I Forget thee O Yerushalayim, let my right hand forget its skills." (Tehillim 137)

Now we can understand the words "Al Naharot Bavel, Sham Yashavnu Gam Bachinu" "By the rivers of Babylon, there we sat and wept." Even though we dwelt in Babylon as citizens enjoying peace and tranquility, there we still wept for Zion.

Gemara Taanit 30b states: "Everyone who mourns for Yerushalayim, merits to share in her joy."

Perhaps this is the message of Jeremiah in Megillat Eicha, to never dry our tears and let them stay on our cheeks over the loss of Zion so we may merit seeing its rebuilding in our days.

Shabbat Shalom ■

Mazal Tov to

Sharon & Israel Katz and family

on the birth of a grandson,  
son of Bati & Bezael Koplun



Mazal tov to

Herbie & Debby Dan and family

on the birth of a grandson  
and Happy B-Day, Herbie!



encouraging the people to repent sincerely and to perform acts of justice and chesed towards the needy, orphans and widows, and promising them the best of the Land in return for their obedience. *“If your sins prove to be like crimson, they will become white as snow; if they prove to be as red as crimson dye, they shall become as wool.”* The *haftorah* concludes with an uplifting promise that G-d will one day reestablish Israel’s judges and leaders, when *“Zion shall be redeemed through justice and her penitents through righteousness.”*

The first word of the *haftorah* is *“Chazon”* (“The vision [of Isaiah]”). The Shabbat when this *haftorah* is read, the Shabbat before Tisha b’Av, is thus called “Shabbat Chazon,” the “Shabbat of the Vision.” ■

## STATS

44th of the 54 sedras; first of 11 in D’varim  
 Written on 196.5 lines (rank: 26th)  
 5 parshiyot; 1 open, 4 closed  
 105 p’sukim - ranks 32, 6th in D’varim tied with Chayei Sara, but larger  
 1548 words - ranks 26th, 6th in D’varim  
 5972 letters - ranks 24, 5th in D’varim tied with Vayei-shev, but smaller  
 Jump in rankings from p’sukim to words & letters due to relatively long p’sukim

## MITZVOT

2 mitzvot - both prohibitions  
 One of only three sedras that have only prohibitions (LO TAASEI). Vayishlach and B’shalach are the other two, with one LAV each.

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