

MATOT



ALIYA-BY-ALIYA SEDRA SUMMARY



Rabbi Reuven Tradburks Director of RCA Israel Region

In the march to the Land of Israel, leadership has transitioned to the new generation. Elazar has replaced Aharon. Yehoshua has been appointed successor to Moshe. There has been military success, with the surrounding nations showing deference and fear of the success of the Jewish people. There have been lessons of leadership; leaders are to serve their people and their G-d. And last week's parsha concluded with a parallel lesson for the people; we too serve our people and our G-d, symbolized by the communal offerings. We are

part of a larger story; the story of the Jewish people. And as such, we approach G-d as that people, with one communal offering for each special occasion.



1st aliya (Bamidbar 30:2-17)

Vows: A commitment must be kept. A young woman's vow may be nullified by her father on the day it is taken; if not nullified, it need be observed. A married woman's vow may be nullified by her husband; if not nullified, it need be observed.

There are 2 things to note in the mitzvah of vows. First, the Torah is vigilant in requiring us to keep our word. That is a hallmark of interpersonal behavior – what I say, I will do. And second, that a man need care for the vows of his wife and daughters.

But why is this mitzvah placed here, at this spot in the Torah?

We are marching to the Land of Israel. Then we will settle there. All will need to take on communal commitments. What I say, I must do. My word is my word; you can count on me. While the march to the Land continues, we are thinking of the day after, the settling of the Land and the building of society. We are pivoting from the march *to* the Land, to the life *in* the Land. That society needs to be built on the reliability of one's word.

The emphasis here on keeping one's word is foreshadowing the story later in the parsha. Gad and Reuven want to stay on the east bank of the Jordan. They pledge to fight



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with the people. Moshe accepts that pledge; because a promise is a promise.

This aspect of vows is part of the philosophy of life that the Torah has created; life is service of a higher calling. We are part of a people who serve G-d. We are part of a larger mission. And hence we need to honor our word, one to another, as we have a precious society to care for.

But our aliya also emphasizes a man's responsibility to care for the vows of his wife and daughters. This is a counterbalance. We serve our people. But we also have our family. Public service gives our life a higher purpose. But not at the expense of our family. Our primary responsibility is to manage our family.

The Jewish society is going to be a knitted society, one of commitments and caring one to another. Beginning at home.



2nd aliya (31:1-12) Conduct a battle of retribution on Midian, after which Moshe shall die.

1,000 soldiers per tribe are led by Pinchas, accompanied by the holy vessels and trumpets. The leaders of Midian are killed, the cities destroyed. All the booty is brought to Moshe and Elazar at the plains of Moav, opposite Jericho.

War is a messy business. Midian tried to ensnare the Jewish men through the Midianite women. That demands a response.

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What is noteworthy is that this battle is not led by Yehoshua. It is led by Pinchas. With each tribe equally represented. And led by the holy vessels. In a word, it is a holy war. It is not retribution that people seek when wronged. It is an affront to the Divine. The response is a Divine response.



3rd aliya (31:13-24) Moshe is angry that the women have been spared, as they were the

snare in the illicit affairs of Baal Peor. He orders their death. Elazar teaches to pass the Midianite utensils through fire and through water before use (kashering and immersing).

The laws of kashering utensils are introduced here. There is a holiness in food preparation; utensils produced or used by non-Jews need to be inaugurated into Jewish use. Converted. This expresses 2 ideas.

First, the theme of remaining separate from non-Jews. This theme will be repeated by Moshe many times in the book of Devarim. And second, that we are not just glorified animals. Human beings are created in the image of G-d. Food consumption, especially with utensils expresses the uniqueness of mankind. Hence, food preparation has special rules, to remind us of our noble station.



4th aliya (31:25-41) The vast booty is divided. The soldiers receive half, the people half.

The soldiers shall give 1/500th of their booty to the Cohanim; the people 1/50th to the Leviim. The booty was: 675,000 sheep, 72,000 cattle, 61,000 donkeys and 32,000 young people. The tithes were given.

The booty is divided equally between the soldiers and the rest of the population. There were 1,000 soldiers per tribe, 12,000



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in total. The census last week yielded a total population of 601,000. That's not fair: 12,000 soldiers get the same as 589,000? Lesson learned: Jewish society values its soldiers, expressing profound appreciation to them with rewards for their service. The benefits that our modern Israeli society grants to soldiers who serve our country are rooted in our Torah. And while a tithe does go to the Kohanim and Leviim, those providing spiritual strength, it is miniscule compared to that given to the soldiers. The Kohanim receive 1/500th of the soldier's half. The Leviim 1/50th of the general population's half. We appreciate the contribution of the religious leaders while appreciating more the contribution of the soldiers.



5th aliya (31:42-54) The leaders of the war approach Moshe: no soldier fell in the battle. We shall

give all the gold and silver booty as an atonement; it numbered 16,750 shekel. It was brought to the Ohel Moed as a remembrance.

In this very brief narrative lies a beautiful gesture. The leaders want to express appreciation that no soldier fell in battle. The military leaders are religiously sensitive. They express their appreciation through a donation to the Ohel Moed. That is exactly what the Torah has been advocating. We serve our people and our G-d.



6th aliya (32:1-19) The tribes of Reuven and Gad have extensive flocks, while the region just

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conquered has lush grazing Land. They requested of Moshe to settle in this spot. Moshe asked rhetorically: your brothers go to war and you sit here? You will demoralize the people as did the spies into not wanting to enter the Land. You saw G-d's reaction in not allowing that generation to enter the Land. The tribes of Reuven and Gad offered to house their flocks and families in place while joining the rest of the people in the battles in the Land.

The war with Midian yielded a vast booty of animals. The Bnei Reuven and Gad figure "if this Land could yield such success, why not stay here?" Makes perfect sense. After all, this is economically secure and stable. It is not the same as the spies. The spies were fearful of taking the Land; which in essence was a repudiation of G-d's promise to champion our settling the Land. These people are

merely comfortable in chutz laaretz. The grass is greener on this side; why venture to the other, the unknown? They don't question whether the Land can be taken; they question why give up the good life. Sound familiar?



7th aliya (32:20-42) Moshe agreed to the offer of the tribes of Reuven and Gad: they would join the

battle for the Land and upon its conclusion would return to the east bank of the Jordan. Moshe informed Yehoshua and Elazar of this, instructing them to ensure that all that was agreed upon be fulfilled. The Lands of Og and Sichon were divided amongst Gad and Reuven, while the region of Gilad was given to half of the tribe of Menashe.

The acquiescence to the request of the tribes of Reuven and Gad is surprising. Why allow them to stay outside of the Land of Israel, settling in the Lands of Og and Sichon? It could be due to their commitment. They have voiced their complete commitment to the Jewish mission of settling the Land of Israel. They will join the battles and only when the Jewish people are settled in the Land, will they return to the other side of the Jordan. They expressed a full commitment to the Jewish mission; hence, Moshe agreed to their request to settle the east bank of the Jordan. ■

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of our parents, grandparents
and great grandparents

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and our brothers and uncles

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כה תמוז

	Matot
of 54 sedras	42nd
of 10 in Bamidbar	9th
lines in a Torah	190
rank	29th
Parshiyot	9
P'tuchot	4
S'tumot	5
P'sukim	112
rank (Torah/Bam.)	24/7
Words	1484
rank	29/6
Letters	5652
rank	30/7
Mitzvot	2
positive	1
prohibitions	1

HAFTORAH MATOT YIRMIYAHU 1:1 - 2:3

This week's *haftorah* is the first of a series of three "*haftorot* of affliction." These three *haftarot* are read during the Three weeks of mourning for Yerushalayim, between the fasts of 17 Tammuz and 9 Av.

Yirmiyahu recounts how Hashem appointed him as prophet — despite his initial reluctance to accept the task — and tells of the encouragement Hashem gave him to fulfill his crucial mission.

He then describes two prophetic visions he was shown. The first featured an almond tree branch. Hashem explained to Yirmiyahu that just like an almond tree is very quick to blossom, so too Hashem will carry out his plan — to punish the Jews for their sins — in due haste.

The second vision was that of a boiling pot whose foam was directed northward. G-d explained that this was an allusion to the afflictions the Jewish people would suffer at the hands of the people from the north of the Holy Land, namely Babylon. G-d will cause the kingdoms of the north to lay siege on Yerushalayim and He will pass judgment on the Jewish people due to their abandonment of G-d's ways and their idol worship.

The haftorah ends with a reassuring prophecy to the people: "Go and call out in the ears of Jerusalem, saying: so said G-d: 'I remember to you the loving-kindness of your youth, the love of your nuptials, your following Me in the desert, in a land not sown. Israel is holy to G-d, the first of His grain; all who eat him shall be guilty, evil shall befall them, says G-d.'"

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