



### Rabbi Reuven Tradburks Director of RCA Israel Region

The Parsha contains 74 mitzvot, the most of any parsha in our Torah. It is the third of the parshiot of Mitzvot; Ekev, Shoftim and Ki Teitzei. Moshe began his long address in Sefer Devarim with narrative, reviewing the central experiences of the desert and their lessons; his intent was to help the entry into the Land be successful. He then switched to speaking not about entering the Land, but how to live in the Land; the building of the Jewish nation. In the Parshiot of Ekev and Shoftim, he outlined Jewish National society beautifully. It is to be an ethical monotheistic society; hence, he outlined the laws of avoiding idol worship, the centrality of what would be Jerusalem and laws of generosity, of sharing with others. He then moved on from the principles of

ethical monotheism to the foundations of our Nation; the judiciary, the executive and the legislature. And now in Ki Teitzei, he focuses on personal mitzvot. Nation building requires government, courts and checks and balances. But government does not make a great nation; it regulates behavior within certain broad frameworks. Greatness will lie in the day-to-day life of the people; how they treat each other, help each other, what they say and what they give, how they live with kindness and generosity in day to day life. That is where the greatness of the Jewish nation will lie. Perhaps said differently: Parshat Shoftim will produce headlines. The court system, the king, the wars. Now those make good headlines. Parshat Ki Teitzei will never make the headlines: returning a lost object, paying wages promptly, healthy relationships in marriage. Regard for others doesn't make headlines, but it makes great nations.



**1<sup>st</sup> aliya (Devarim 21:10-21) Captive Woman:** One may not marry a woman captured in war until 30

days have elapsed and the passion subsided. **First born:** The rights of the first born to a double portion shall not be diverted to the first born of a more favoured wife. **Ben Sorer U'moreh:** a boy entering adulthood who is brazen and gluttonous shall be judged on the fear of future more egregious behaviour.

The soldier is able to marry the non-Jewish woman captured in war; but only after a month of seeing her daily in an unkempt manner. But what is left unsaid is far more important: war is accompanied by rape and pillage of women. Women are viewed as the spoils of war. Not in the Jewish army. The permission granted to marry this non-Jewish woman after a month screams out the

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far more basic war ethic: war should never ever be seen by the Jewish army as license for abuse of women.



**2<sup>nd</sup> aliya (21:22-22:7) Burial:** Do not allow the body of one sentenced to death to be hung. He is

to be buried immediately. **Returning Lost Property:** Don't look away from lost property; return it to its owner. Help up an overly **burdened animal** who has buckled; don't look away. Do not **cross dress**. **Send** a mother bird away before taking the eggs or chicks.

Look at the implied ethic. A person sentenced to death has committed the most serious of sins. Nonetheless, human beings never lose the right to dignity. Even one sentenced to death is a human being; their body is not to be left hanging, but to be buried immediately. Human beings may sully their dignity by terrible crimes deserving of death; but they never forfeit their essential human dignity.

A further implied ethic is contained in the return of lost property. Legal ethics can only regulate that I do not damage your property. But Jewish ethics mandates that we go much further; I need to jump to help your property. There can be no passive bystanders; we need to jump to save lives of others and property of others.

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**3<sup>rd</sup> aliya (22:8-23:7)** Build a **fence on your roof** to prevent accidents. **Do not: plant** vines

and grain together, **plow** with ox and mules together, **wear** wool and linen **together**. A man shall not: **slander** a new bride claiming her not to be a virgin, nor commit **adultery** with a married woman, nor with a betrothed bride, nor **rape** a single woman. One may **not marry** a mamzer, nor a male from Ammon or Moav.

In this aliya we have mitzvot about the most basic of daily life: our homes, our fields or livelihood, our clothes and our relationships with our partners. Each one of these regulates the basic aspects of our lives. In this lies the profound meaning of this parsha. The Torah infuses our lives with meaning. Our relationships, our homes, our food, our clothes; all these things take on meaning when regulated by mitzvot. Rav Soloveitchik called this redemption, or geula; man's mundane life is redeemed from vulgarity and emptiness by mitzvot. Suddenly, the trite and trivial, the banal life we live becomes meaningful, an expression of loyalty to our Creator and His love of us by commanding us.



**4<sup>th</sup> aliya (23:8-23:24)** One **may marry** one from Edom or Egypt. **Military encampments** shall be

treated with a degree of **cleanliness**;

bathroom facilities shall be outside the camp. Since G-d's presence goes with you, your camp has holiness. **Shelter** a runaway slave. Do not engage in **prostitution**, nor accept its gains as offerings. Do not exact **loan interest**. **Do** that which you **vow**; do not delay its fulfilment.

The charging of interest on a loan is not permitted. This is a Torah legislated type of welfare. When a person is in trouble and needs a loan, he is vulnerable to loan sharking. If he needs money and is desperate, what better recipe for milking him for all he is worth. The Torah forbids the preying on misfortune. Find another way to profit; not off the misfortune of others.



**5<sup>th</sup> aliya (23:25-24:4)** **Harvesters** may eat grapes or grains while harvesting. **Divorce**: Divorce

need be done through a bill of divorce (a Get). If the woman marries another she may not return to remarry the first husband.

Allowing the worker to eat that which he is harvesting is the introduction of employer ethics. Being an employer comes with responsibility; people's lives are in your hands. Allowing the worker to consume what he is harvesting is merely an example of sensitivity to the feelings of employees. Worker's rights have their basis in these verses.

Divorce is accomplished through a Get, or

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a document of divorce. While the creation of a marriage is called kiddushin and has holiness, the dissolution of the marriage must be absolute and complete. The Get is called sefer kritut, a document of complete dissolution. The granting of complete freedom to the woman is the essence of divorce. Creating a relationship is marriage; granting complete freedom is divorce.



**6<sup>th</sup> aliya (24:5-13) First year marriage:** Do not go to war in the first year of marriage: bring

joy to the new bride. **Kidnapping** is a capital offense. Remember Miriam's **Tzarat** and keep its laws. **Collateral** may be taken, but only with the owner's cooperation. If the owner needs this collateral, return it to him nightly.

If I lend you money and am concerned that you will not pay me back, I may secure my loan with collateral. That makes sense. But the granting of collateral, while fair, should be fair to the borrower as well. Monetary laws are all the balancing of conflicting interests. Benefitting the lender, disadvantages the borrower. And benefitting the borrower, has a cost to the lender. The Torah alerts us to be sensitive in all monetary dealings; an action that benefits one, hurts the other. Balancing the needs of both is the message of the rules of the taking of collateral.



**7<sup>th</sup> aliya (24:14-25:16) Do not withhold wages:** workers are to be paid before the end of the day.

Do not **pervert justice** of the foreigner or widow. When **harvesting** grain, olives or grapes, leave the dropped produce for the needy. No more than 40 **lashes** shall ever be given. **Yibum:** a brother shall marry the childless widow of his brother and hence maintain

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his name. Maintain only **accurate weights** and measures. Remember what **Amalek** did to you in attacking the weak when you left Egypt. Erase any memory of him.

In one aliya we have mitzvot of wages, of justice, of kindness, of lashes, of levirate marriage, of honesty in business and of Amalek. The lack of a clear pattern to these mitzvot is itself instructive. Perhaps Moshe is deliberately moving from generosity to justice to business to war. He wants to cover mitzvot in all aspects of our life. Our lives include homes and relationships and work and war and honesty and keeping our word and paying our workers....and on and on. Moshe is describing our life. And telling us that in all aspects of our lives we have mitzvot; ways to do things nobly and with holiness. And that there is nary a part of life void of mitzvot. It is this richness of behavior in our personal life that is truly the necessary ingredient of nation building. The Jewish nation will be built on ethical monotheism, on national institutions that are kept in check; but ultimately a great nation is built in the homes and in the private lives of its citizens. The nation is built on the quiet, private behavior of its people, in all the facets of their lives. ■

## STATS

49th of the 54 sedras; 6th of 11 in D'varim  
Written on 212.8 lines; ranks 21st  
44 Parshiyot; 2 open, 42 closed; rank: 1  
110 p'sukim; ranks 28th (5th in D'varim)  
1582 words; ranks 23rd (5th in D'varim)  
5856 letters; ranks 26th (6th in D'varim)

## MITZVOT

74 mitzvot - 27 positive, 47 prohibitions; Ki Teitzei has the most mitzvot (both positive and prohibitions) in the Torah



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