



ALIYA-BY-ALIYA SEDRA SUMMARY

RABBI REUVEN TRADBURKS
RCA ISRAEL REGION

BEHAR-BECHUKOTAI



1ST ALIYA (VAYIKRA 25:1-18)

Shmita: The Land of Israel has its Shabbat. Work 6 years, the 7th is a Shabbat to G-d. What grows on its own is available to be used. **Yovel:** 7 cycles of 7 years are followed by Yovel, the 50th year, the Jubilee year. It is holy; pronounce liberty throughout the Land. Slaves go free; land returns to its original owner. When selling your land, do not abuse the buyer knowing the land will return to you in the 50th year. Sell it commensurate with the years the buyer will have until Yovel. Keeping these laws will allow you to be secure in the Land.

The section about the sabbatical year follows immediately the section about the holidays from last week. The holidays were introduced with Shabbat. Shabbat is a holy day. The holidays are holy days.

The Shabbat in time is followed now by the Shabbat of the Land.

But I believe there is another thematic flow

of the Torah.

All of the narrative following the receiving of the Torah at Sinai is preparing for the Land of Israel. We didn't leave Egypt just to become a free people. We are a free people in order to build a Jewish life. We are on our way to the Land of Israel, to establish our Jewish society there. A distinctive, holy, generous Jewish society. In a word, ethical monotheism.

The listing of the holidays last week had an odd addition; a long section about the Omer offering and a long description of the offerings of Shavuot.

Because the emphasis of that listing was agriculture. Our holidays are linked to agricultural moments.

For the Jews in the desert, to hear about first fruits, harvest, reaping, sounds like the garden of Eden. The manna is falling from the sky. It's hot. The desert. But it won't be soon. Soon you will enter the Land of Israel. Plant, work, harvest. And you will express thanks, appreciation to the Giver of All when you experience that bounty. It will be agriculture Jewish, bounty with blessing, harvest with thanks. For after all, even with all your hard work, blessing comes from Above.

Shemita and Yovel are a continuation of that theme. Not working the land for a year is throwing your fate to the wind. What will we eat? How will we survive?

Well, you aren't throwing your fate to the wind; you are handing your fate to your Creator. If He Says to rest, He Will provide. Because you are used to that notion that He Provides. He Provides when we plant. And

In loving memory of and לע"נ

Elaine J. Mittman a"h

אסתר איטא בת ברוך וסימא ע"ה

On her 6th yearzeit - כד אי"ר

**Cherished mother, grandmother
and great-grandmother**

*Arlene Anteby
Bobbie & Heshy Brooks*

He Provides when we don't.



2ND ALIYA (25:19-28)

Don't be concerned that you will not have enough to eat if you rest the land; I will provide. Let the land not be permanently sold; for the land is Mine, you but sojourners on it. If **one becomes needy and sells his field**, redeem it. The seller may also redeem it according to the years left until it returns to him in Yovel.

Our parsha is dominated by the theme of ownership. Or better, a Jewish perspective on ownership.

Living a life in Egypt devoid of ownership and now living in the desert devoid of ownership was a teaching moment. Man's worth is not expressed in the things he has. But in the person that he is.

That in a nutshell is the Jewish view of ownership. I am not proposing a Jewish economic theory of socialism versus capitalism. But rather a perspective, that what we have needs to be viewed through the lens of our values.

Shmita and Yovel introduced a notion of limited ownership in the Land of Israel. Now the Torah introduces another limitation to ownership, that of the buyer.

When I buy a field from someone who is in trouble, my purchase is limited. By realization of the seller. The sale of a field cannot end well. It's losing a job. In an agrarian society, what will this former landowner do for a living? This is the beginning of a downward spiral. You the buyer, let someone redeem this field; get it back to the seller so he can make a living.

My purchase of the field is limited by concern for the seller. This is as the Talmud states: the highest form of tzedaka is giving a person a job. Allowing the field to be redeemed is returning to the seller his way of making a living.



3RD ALIYA (25:29-38)

A **house in a city** may also be redeemed **if sold**, but only within the first year. After that, the sale is permanent. **Homes in open towns** are considered like fields; they may be redeemed and they return in Yovel. The **towns of the Leviim**, even if walled, are always able to be redeemed and they too return in Yovel. When **one is in need**, help him. Do not charge interest; give him life. I am G-d who took you out of Egypt to give you this Land and to be your G-d.

The Talmud points out that the progression of stories the Torah presents here is from bad to worse. A forced sale of a field due to poverty. Then the sale of a home. Then the need for a loan. And in the next aliya, sold as a slave. The cheapest tzedaka is the first one; getting the field back, avoiding this whole collapse.



4TH ALIYA (25:39-26:9)

If one is **sold to you as a slave**, do not oppress him. Treat him as a worker. He goes free in the Yovel year. For you are My servants. **Slaves purchased from the surrounding nations** are as property that passes to future generations. If a **Jew is sold to a non-Jew**, a relative shall redeem him, for the Jewish people are servants to Me; My servants that I redeemed from Egypt. (Bechukotai) And if you will do all my mitzvot you will have bounty, peace, unusual success against your enemies. I will turn to you, multiply you and fulfill My covenant with you.

Parshat Bechukotai, though short, is powerful. Following an entire book of holiness, the stakes are laid out.

Don't think the pursuit of holiness in the Land is optional, a nice thing. No, no. You are being blessed with this Land to build a holy and generous place. To build a society that is G-d centered. The Holy Land is a high stakes

endeavor. There will be wonderful blessing; food, peace, health. When you do it right.

For us, who enjoy walking in this holy place, the blessings are abundant. But we have to do it right.



5TH ALIYA (26:10-46)

And I will be in your midst; I, your G-d, You, my people. I will remove the yokes from you and you will walk proudly. But if you do not do My mitzvot, I too will not pay attention to you. You will be subjected to illness, to enemies, to drought. If you persist in ignoring Me, I will persist in ignoring you, leaving you vulnerable to war, pestilence, famine. Your holy places will be vanquished, your cities destroyed; you will be scattered around the world. Then the land will have the rest of its Shmita. You will be panicked in your exile, afraid of a driven leaf. You will admit your failings; I will remember my promises to you. Even in your dispersion, I will not allow you to be destroyed.

Failure to live up to the demands of this holy place brings desolation and exile. The Land of Israel is described as flowing with milk and honey. And yet we know that once the Jewish people left, the land was barren. The desolation of the Land of Israel without the Jewish people is legendary. Chilling.

The diaspora of the Jewish people is predicted here. We know all too well the extent of that exile and the suffering we endured in it. Jewish suffering in exile was taken by other religions to be a sign of the rejection of the Jew.

But for us returnees, those of us walking tall in our Land, well, for us, if we saw exile as G-d's disfavor, shall we not delight that our return is, I guess, His Pull? If the exile was Divine displeasure with our dismissive attitude to Him, the return to the Land can only be Divine pleasure in bringing us close. And

the return to the Land of Israel, so unexpected, so unprecedented, and so dynamic is a powerful refutation of the rejection of the Jew.

And a charge for us; to never be dismissive of Him, but to engage, to search, to reach. What privileged times we, the undeserving, are fortunate to be a part of. And how vigilant we need to be to not again be dismissive of Him in His Land.



6TH ALIYA (27:1-15)

When you make a **vow of your value** to G-d, there are set values for different ages and stations. This value is given to the Mikdash. If you pledge an **animal**, it is given and should not be switched. A pledge of a **home** may be given or redeemed.

Following the chilling section of the curses, the book of Vayikra ends with a full chapter of laws of vows. Generosity inspires contributions to the Mikdash. That's a good thing. The religious center of the Jewish people needs contributions.

But this section is not only about what is given; but also, what is not. When I pledge my value, is my intent to become a monk, giving up my life to serve in the Mikdash?

The Torah does not endorse that. Pay money; keep your station in life. The Torah imposes the interpretation of vows of people and their value to be monetary gifts; but not Temple slaves. If you pledge an animal? Fine, let that become a sacrifice. But not you. Or any around you.

A home too; the Torah does not want the Mikdash to acquire vast holdings. Homes are for people; the Mikdash is to be splendid, grand, and inspiring. But it is not to become a vast financial empire.



7TH ALIYA (27:16-34)

If a **field** is pledged, it's worth until Yovel is calculated. That

value is given to the Mikdash to redeem the field. If it is not redeemed, it remains with the Mikdash even after Yovel. **Property** which becomes owned by the Mikdash may not be redeemed.

Fields are the quintessential means of livelihood. If you wanted the Mikdash to be a financial empire, fields would be the place to start. But the Torah's default is that a donation of a field ought to be redeemed. Fields are for the people to make a living; not for the Mikdash.

The book of Vayikra, the book of man's approach to G-d, ends with a sober balance. While we approach G-d, dedicate our lives to Him, reach for Him, and He for us, the Torah protects us from going too far, from divesting of our assets, ridding ourselves of our homes and becoming a Temple slave, giving our all to the Mikdash.

Our challenge is to be holy in our homes and our fields while reaching for the Divine.

HAFTORAH YIRMIYAHU 16:19-17:14

The theme found in the Torah reading of blessings and curses is echoed in the haftorah which discusses the punishment to those who disregard God's will and the reward to those who follow His will.

The courageous prophet Yirmiyahu scolds the people and warns them of the disaster if they maintain their idolatrous practices. Nothing less than exile from the Holy Land will come as the result of not having faith in God and commitment to the mitzvot.

Moreover, there is the positive outgrowth of obedience and loyalty to the Torah: "Blessed is the man who trusts in God; to whom God will be his trust. For he shall be like a tree planted by the water, and which spreads its roots out

into a stream, so it will not be affected when heat comes, and its leaves shall be green, and in the year of drought will not be anxious, neither shall it cease from bearing fruit."

The haftorah concludes with a declaration of hope and salvation: "Heal me, O God, then shall I be healed; help me, then I shall be helped, for You are my praise!" ■

| STATS | | | |
|----------------------|-------|--------|-------|
| | Behar | Bechuk | Total |
| of 54 Sedras | 32nd | 33rd | - |
| of 10 in Vayikra | 9th | 10th | - |
| Lines in a Torah | 99 | 131 | 230 |
| Rank | 50th | 47th | - |
| Parshiyot | 7 | 5 | 12 |
| Ptuchot | 1 | 3 | 4 |
| Stumot | 6 | 2 | 8 |
| Pesukim | 57 | 78 | 135 |
| Rank (Torah/Vayikra) | 50/10 | 46/7 | - |
| Words | 737 | 1013 | 1750 |
| Rank | 50/10 | 47/7 | - |
| Letters | 2817 | 3992 | 6809 |
| Rank | 50/10 | 47/7 | - |

| MITZVOT | | | |
|--------------|-------|--------|-------|
| | Behar | Bechuk | Total |
| Positive | 7 | 7 | 14 |
| Prohibitions | 17 | 5 | 22 |
| Total | 24 | 12 | 36 |

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