



# ALIYA-BY-ALIYA SEDRA SUMMARY

RABBI REUVEN TRADBURKS  
RCA ISRAEL REGION



SHAVUOT

The Torah reading for Shavuot (Shemot 19:1-20:23) is the story of the giving of the Torah at Mt. Sinai. It describes the prelude to the giving of the Torah, the preparation for it and then the 10 Commandments.

There is a tradition to read the 10 Commandments with what is known as “taamei elyon”, literally, the higher set of notes. There are 2 sets of trop or how to read these verses. One version divides the verses as we have them in our Chumash. The second, the taamei elyon, does not divide by verses but by paragraphs. For example, the first 6 verses are combined into one long verse. Similarly, the 3 verses of the commandment of Shabbat are combined into one long verse. The motivation for doing this seems to be to want to read these as 10 Dibrot – utterances. Not to emphasize the cognitive meaning of the verses but

the experience.

And that is really an expression of the meaning of Shavuot. The Torah is filled with mitzvot. It is not the content of the 10 Commandments that is significant. It is the drama of G-d speaking to man. The Divine communicating with the finite. That is a cosmic moment, an incredible moment, a unique moment in history. It is G-d descending, summoning us to Him, and communicating directly with man. Amidst fire, smoke, thunder and lightning, the mountain shaking. It is a sublime moment. A moment of intimacy, of desire of G-d for mankind, of the touch of heaven and earth.

We reflect this theme of intimacy, of uniqueness, of experience in 3 ways. One is by reading Akdamot before the Torah reading, which essentially is an expression in poetry of this sublime moment. And secondly, by standing for the Torah reading, which is a way of perhaps emphasizing the experience rather than the content of this moment. And third, by using this unique trop, the taamei elyon, dividing the reading into utterances, phrases, as if we are hearing the 10 Dibrot, the 10 utterances as they heard at Sinai.

This emphasis on the experience of Sinai motivates the choice of the Haftarah, the first chapter of the book of Ezekiel. This chapter is known as Maaseh Merkava, the vision of the chariot. It is a description of the angels and the Divine, full of metaphoric perception of G-d. This is chosen to parallel the Torah reading, emphasizing the sublime, mysterious, awesome experience of Sinai. ■

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### PARSHAT NASO

While the book of Vayikra was the book of Holiness, the book of Bamidbar is the book of the national march to the Land.

They share the notion of aspiration. In Vayikra the aspiration was for Holiness, the reach beyond, the reach for the Divine. In Bamidbar, the aspiration is the Land of Israel, the march to the Land, the national aspiration to build our Jewish society in our Land.

And they share aspirations delayed, aspirations marred.

In Vayikra, the reach for the Divine, the entry to the Mikdash, was marred by Tuma. One who is Tamei, impure, needed to remove the Tuma to enter the Mikdash. A setback, but a setback that is resolved through purification. In all the aspects of Kedusha of the book of Vayikra, Kedusha being aspiration for the beyond, the setbacks have solutions, are resolvable.

May the learning in this issue of  
Torah Tidbits *בעילוי נשמת* our  
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**CLARA HOROWITZ a"h**  
Beloved Mother, Grandmother,  
and Great Grandmother  
on her 26<sup>th</sup> Yahrtzeit *ח' סיון*

*Mina and Howard Millendorf*  
*Sharon, Shlomo,*  
*Elior, Amiad, and Yagel Rabinowitz*

And in our book of Bamidbar, the national march to the Land, the aspirational march is introduced with structure, with functions, with a census. The order of the impending march. But the aspirations are marred by the spies, by conflicts of Korach, of the failures of the chase of the Midianite women.

But these, the aspiration for Holiness and the aspiration of the Land are two entirely different processes. Holiness, its setbacks and its resolutions, is an oscillating process. Circular. We pursue Holiness, achieve it, fall back and then regain purity. The pursuit of G-d and of Holiness is an oscillating one, moving forward, moving backward and regaining forward. The Holiness of time of the holidays is oscillating, repeating year after year. Holiness is achieved, lost and regained. That is the pattern of religious life.

History and its aspiration are an entirely different process. It does not oscillate. It moves in a linear motion. History aspires, interrupts, redirects. History is constantly changing. While man in his religious life oscillates, history moves linearly, never returning, ever changing. It is not circular, it is linear.

So, while Tuma prevents entry to the Mikdash, it has a process to remove it and allow entry. That is a circular process, returning to where we began.

The march to the Land of Israel is man in history. History never returns to where it began. History marches forward. The spies interrupt the march and while the march will continue, it is not with those people but with an entirely different group.

The Jew lives a life of oscillation, a religious life of aspiration. The Nation lives a linear life, where failures and disappointments disrupt the march, never to be regained quite the same, with the line redirected.

Jewish history of the exile was the private religious life of oscillation, the life of Vayikra, a circular life of the pursuit of Holiness. We, the privileged generation of redemption, we are living Jewish life of Bamidbar, where National Jewish history moves forward, where the aspiration of order is marred and disrupted, but where we move in a linear fashion, ever forward, albeit in different directions.

We, the privileged Jews of redemption cannot view Jewish life only through the lens of Vayikra, as the same oscillating pursuit of Holiness with disregard for history for then we fail to grasp the monumental shift that is the book of Bamidbar, the pivot from Holiness to history, from oscillation to the linear reality of the march of history.



#### 1ST ALIYA (BAMIDBAR 4:21-37)

A census of the family of **Gershon** (son of Levi) is done. The family of Gershon is responsible for transporting the textiles of the Mishkan: the curtains and the covers of the Mishkan. They are to function under the supervision of Aharon and his sons; in their case, under Itamar. The census of the family of **Merari** is taken. Their responsibility is the structure of the Mishkan: boards, sockets, wall braces. Their tasks are assigned by name, supervised by Itamar. The census, aged 30 – 50, of the family of Kehat is 2, 750.

The three family units of Levi have special jobs in transporting the Mishkan. Kehat takes care of the holy vessels. Gershon is responsible for the textiles; the curtains and covers. And Merari transports the building; the walls and their supports.

The book of Bamidbar is the march to the Land of Israel. The latter half of Shemot contained the building of the Mishkan. The book of Vayikra described what will happen in the Mishkan including the role of the kohanim in the service in the Mishkan.

Now in Bamidbar we are ready to travel to the Land. We switch from describing it, to doing it. This portable sanctuary, well, has to be transported. How will we do that? That is the job of the Leviim.

This description of jobs is a crucial piece of the march to the Land. Everyone has their role to play. Kohanim have a holy role. Leviim have the role of support of the holy. The leaders of the tribes do the census. And bring offerings for the inauguration of the Mishkan. The census is necessary to plan for those who will serve in the military.

Said differently, we have focused in the Torah up until here on the engagement of man with his G-d. Now we focus on man and his people. And in particular, serving his people.

In loving memory of  
our dear Brother and Uncle

**Alan Beer** Hy"d  
אברהם חיים בן  
יעקב שמואל זנוויל הי"ד

It has been 23 years since that  
terrible pigua that took your life  
on the 14 bus on Jaffa Road  
י"א סיון, תשס"ג

May the Torah learned from  
this issue be in his merit

*The Maisel, Beer  
and Carroll Families  
Efrat, Cleveland and Norfolk*

While the theme of the book of Bamidbar is the march to the Land, it is not an historical book, a descriptive book. It is also a prescriptive book. We as individuals take our place as part of our national destiny. With different roles.

In our time, with the return to the Land of Israel, we have again become familiar with this duality, of personal service to G-d and of service to our people. That notion of serving our people is not an invention of modern Zionism; it is the theme of an entire book of our Torah.



### 2ND ALIYA (4:38-49)

The census of Gershon, 2, 630, and Merari, 3, 200. The total of those who will serve and carry the Mishkan is 8, 580.

In this brief aliya, the census of the Leviim is completed. But in the Leviim's census, the number is accompanied by the phrase "and their task". Because it isn't the numbers that are important, but the number of people available for these tasks. It is people being prepared to assume their roles in this national project of the Jewish people, the march to the Land.

The beginning of the book of Bamidbar is an accountant's dream. Orderly, thorough, numbers, sums, structure.

But we know what will happen in this book of Bamidbar. There will be rebellions and disputes, the spies and Korach. On paper, there is order. In life, chaos.

Oh, that our national life would be so neat and tidy. You here, you here. You doing your task, you doing yours. All of us recognizing G-d in our midst. This is a lovely description of how we *ought* to live and how we *ought* to travel on into the Land of Israel.

But the book of Bamidbar is the meeting of the ideal with the real.



### 3RD ALIYA (5:1-10)

Command the people to send those, male or female, with Tzarat, or who are Zavim or Tamei out of the camp. The people did so. A man or woman who steals, swears denying the theft and then admits, shall repay the principal plus one fifth to the owner. If the owner has died leaving no heirs, the payment is paid to the kohen. The kohen's portions fully belong to him.

Following the description of the Jewish encampment and the Leviim's role in the travel of the camp, there is a break in the narrative. A few mitzvot are introduced.

However, these are not a break in the theme of the book, only a break in the narrative.

The theme of our national belonging is damaged occasionally by our behavior.

We have mitzvot of kindness, mitzvot of holiness, mitzvot of memory. And mitzvot related to our national belonging, to our social fabric.

Theft and then swearing to cover it up will not serve our national interest. Mistakes will happen. But coverups or lying to dismiss them is far more damaging to our social structure than admitting guilt. Mistakes are the stuff of humanity. Honesty and responsibility are the stuff of society. The Torah does not assume we will be perfect but it does demand that we be responsible and honest.



### 4TH ALIYA (5:11-6:27)

The **Sotah**: If a married woman is suspected by her husband of being unfaithful with a particular man and he warns her to not be alone with that man, and she nonetheless spends time alone with that man, then she is brought to the kohen. She brings a simple offering. The kohen places water and dust in a container. She swears that she is innocent (of adultery). The kohen

writes in a scroll that should she be guilty, the water she will drink will cause fatal internal damage. These words are put in the water. Her offering is brought; the water is drunk by her. If she is guilty, this will be fatal. If innocent, this will prove it. The **Nazir**: When a person vows to be a Nazir, they may not drink wine or any product from a grape, may not cut their hair and may not come in contact with the dead, including closest relatives. If the Nazir does come in contact with the dead before the conclusion of his Nazir status, then he must bring an offering of 2 birds, one for a chatat and one for an olah. At the final end of his Nazir status, he brings animals for a chatat, an olah and a shlamim. He cuts his hair and burns it. **Birkat Kohanim**: Tell Aharon that he shall bless the Jewish people with Birkat Kohanim: in so doing they place My name on the people and I bless them.

The 2 elaborate mitzvot mentioned here, Sotah and Nazir, are breaches in communal life, hence mentioned here in this book of the communal march to the Land. The Sotah, the wife suspected of adultery, is a breakdown in the holiness of family life, a societal foundation.

The Nazir is a breach in the reach for super holiness; as if to say the Torah isn't enough, isn't holy enough for me. Insufficient holiness is a breach, but no less a breach is super holiness.

While we like to say that we don't know which mitzvot are big ones and which are little, we can say that some mitzvot have societal impact that amplifies them. The violation of Shabbat was viewed as damaging our religious social fabric. And here, the holiness of family life has an outsized place in our Jewish society, with its breakdown having an outsized deleterious effect.

And the Nazir, who desires a super holy

life, can be viewed both positively and negatively. For him personally, the reach for super holiness seems a good thing. But his reach for super holiness implies that the Torah is insufficient. That can have a damaging effect on society



### 5TH ALIYA (7:1-41)

On the day Moshe completed, anointed and sanctified the Mishkan and all it contains, the leaders of the tribes brought a contribution. They brought 6 wagons and 12 oxen for the transport of the Mishkan: 2 wagons and 4 oxen were given to Gershon, 4 wagons and 8 oxen to Merari. Kehat did not receive any for they carried the vessels of the Mishkan on their shoulders. The leaders of each of the 12 tribes brought offerings as an inauguration of the Mishkan. Each day the leader of the tribe is named and his offering brought. Each leader's offering is identical.

Our parsha is the longest parsha in the Torah due to these last 3 aliyot. In fact, these 3 aliyot are only one chapter but a chapter of 89 verses, longer than many full parshiot.



### 6TH ALIYA (7:42-71)

The description of the leader's offerings continues, outlining days 6 to 10.

Each day a different Nasi, head of the tribe brought an offering, though the offering was identical each day. What a dichotomy. On the one hand differentiation; 12 tribes, variety, distinctions and individuality. On the other, conformity; the exact same offering from these diverse men. What an apt description of the human condition. We share eyes, ears,

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nose and mouth. Yet our inner life is unique, uniquely our own. Uniformity and diversity.



### 7TH ALIYA (7:72-89)

The description of the leader's offerings continues, with days 11 and 12. The Torah enumerates the totals of each of the offerings brought by the leaders. These served as inauguration of the anointed altar. When Moshe entered the Ohel Moed to speak with G-d, he heard the Voice emanate from upon the kaporet, the covering of the Aron, from between the angels and He spoke with him.

The parsha concludes with a repetition that G-d spoke to Moshe from above the Aron. Whereas the emphasis previously was on the magic of the meeting of G-d and man, here the emphasis is on the content: Moshe acts on Divine instruction, not his own personal power and pride. ■



### STATS

35th of 54 sedras; 2nd of 10 in Bamidbar. Written on 311 lines in a Sefer Torah. That's a record breaking 7.4 columns 26 parshiyot; 18 open, 8 closed. Only 4 sedras have more parshiyot. 176 pesukim, 2264 words, 8632 letters. Indisputably the longest sedra in the Torah, however you count length. Naso is well below average, though, in length of pesukim, but not enough to affect its first place ranking.



### MITZVOT

18 mitzvot; 7 positive, 11 prohibitions - the most of Bamidbar's 10 sedras. 18 might not seem to be that many mitzvot, but only 9 sedras in the Torah (of 54) have more mitzvot than Naso.



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