



ALIYA-BY-ALIYA SEDRA SUMMARY

RABBI REUVEN TRADBURKS
RCA ISRAEL REGION

MATOT-MASEI



1ST ALIYA (BAMIDBAR 30:2-31:12)

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. 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.

The book of Bamidbar is preoccupied with the march to the Land of Israel, albeit in fits and starts. But interspersed are various mitzvot. The timing and placement of these mitzvot invites explanation.

Why is the narrative of the march

interrupted here with the mitzva of honoring vows and how vows may be voided? What has just happened and what is about to happen which prompts placing the subject of vows right here?

It could be following on the tails of Bilaam. Look at how powerful words are; his curse would have damaged us. Similarly, there is power in *our* words to obligate us. Be careful with words.

Additionally, this foreshadows what is about to happen in this parsha. The tribes of Reuven, Gad and half of Menashe want to remain on the east bank of the Jordan. Moshe requires them to join in the battle for the Land and only afterwards to return to their families and possessions on the east bank. They give their word.

Is their word sufficient? After all it is only their word. People lie and exaggerate. Therefore, the Torah demands of us to keep our word. And once having done so, Moshe too can rely on the word of these tribes. We may doubt the word of man; but the Torah does not. In the eyes of the Torah, a promise is a promise. And can be relied upon.



2ND ALIYA (31:13-54)

Moshe is angry that the women have been spared, as they were the snares 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 vast booty is divided. The soldiers receive half, the people half. The soldiers shall give 1/500th of their booty to the kohanim; the

לע"נ
שושנה בת
מרדכי נחמן ומרים ע"ה
SHANA ARANOWSKY
WEINER ע"ה
 Upon her 39th **yahrzeit** - כ"ו תמוז
 יהי זכרה ברוך
Weiner, Miller, Saar
& Solomont families

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 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.

The detail of the booty and its division must be for a reason, for some lesson. The booty is divided equally between the soldiers and the rest of the population. There were 1,000 soldiers per tribe, 12,000 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? The soldier is getting 50 times the share of the non-soldiers. What a powerful statement: we value the soldiers so much we reward them with a 50 fold share of the booty. This expresses the profound appreciation we have for our soldiers. The benefits that our modern Israeli society grants to soldiers who serve our country is rooted in our Torah. And while a tithe does go to the Kohanim and Leviim who provide 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.



3RD ALIYA (32:1-19)

The tribes of Reuven and Gad have extensive flocks, while the region just 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.



4TH ALIYA (32:20-33:49)

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. (Parshat Masei) Moshe recorded all the travels until here, listing them all in great detail including that upon arrival at Hor Hahar Aharon died at age 123 on the first of the fifth month (1 Av). The travels concluded at the plains of Moav opposite Jericho.

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 that the Jewish people are conveying a message of what could be called a Newtonian law of national justice; every opposition to us, will be met with an opposition to you. Sichon and Og fought the Jewish people.

And were conquered. These lands now can unequivocally be claimed as ours. Justice for nations demands that opposition not be easily forgiven. Were all the Jews to have entered the land, this area would be resettled by the adversary. And that would be unjust. So too with the war with Midian. The national effort at seduction cannot be left unopposed. And so, the offer to settle these lands is accepted by Moshe.



5TH ALIYA (33:50-34:15)

On the banks of the Jordan, the people are commanded: take the Land of Israel and settle it for it is given to you. You must supplant the people of the Land for if not, they will be a thorn in your side; and inevitably, what I am commanding of you to supplant them, will be done by them to you. The borders of the Land: in the south from the Mediterranean Sea to the Dead Sea, the western border is the Mediterranean Sea north into Lebanon, the North into Syria, the east along the Jordan.

The delineation of the borders of the Land is tricky because some of the landmarks it describes are not familiar to us. Nonetheless it is clear that the southern border does not extend all the way down to Eilat. The northern border extends well into Lebanon of today. And the eastern border includes much of Syria of today.



6TH ALIYA (34:16-35:8)

The leaders of the tribes shall apportion the Land. The Leviim shall be given cities amongst the tribes. Each city shall have open area and grazing area surrounding it, 2,000 amot in total area outside the city. The Leviim may settle in the cities of refuge or in 48 designated cities. These cities are provided by the tribes, according to the size of the tribe and their allotted area.

The description of the open and grazing area around the city is one of the ecological

passages of the Torah. Green lung around the city. 2,000 amot is about a kilometer. As the cities were small (no need for wide roads for cars in the ancient world), this amounts to a healthy greenbelt around the city.



7TH ALIYA (35:9-35:13)

Cities of Refuge are to be allocated, 3 on the west side of the Jordan, 3 on the east. One who kills accidentally may flee there. It is not accidental but rather murder if one attacks with a lethal weapon, or the assault is premeditated. The murderer shall be put to death; he may not flee to these cities. The relatives of the daughters of Zelophchad pointed out to Moshe that their family inheritance will be damaged. For the daughters will marry men of another tribe; the integrity of their family allotment will be damaged. It will not even return in Yovel, for it will begin with another tribe. Moshe instructed that these women marry men from their family so as to maintain the integrity of the family allotment.

In the description of the cities of refuge, any illusion that the Jewish society in the Land will be perfect is dispelled. There will be murders; accidental and pre-meditated. And earlier in this parsha, we fought a battle due to the failing of sexual impropriety with the women of Midian. And earlier in the Torah, the Golden Calf and idol worship.

So there you have it: the Jews of the desert have covered the big 3, idolatry, adultery and murder. We aren't, nor do we have illusions that we will be a perfect society. But, with that full knowledge, G-d is promising us that we will enter the Land imminently. Some Jews will err, will sin, will fail. But not the Jewish people. The covenant with the people endures. Rocky at times, but enduring.

The book of Bamidbar ends on the banks of the Jordan, poised to enter the Land. ■