



ALIYA-BY-ALIYA SEDRA SUMMARY

RABBI REUVEN TRADBURKS
RCA ISRAEL REGION

PARSHAT DEVARIM

The book of Devarim is entirely different from the other 4 books of the Torah.

The people are standing at the banks of the Jordan river, ready to enter the land of Israel. Moshe is not going with them. So, he wants to give them a charge, a speech, some kind of direction, his thoughts.

He gives them a speech. For 30 chapters. That is a long, very long, speech.

The entire book is Moshe speaking. There is no “And G-d spoke to Moshe saying, teach the people of Israel”. It is all Moshe. And his thoughts.

The book is called Deuteronomy in English, while the Talmud calls it Mishneh Torah. They both mean two, as if to say this book is the review of the Torah, or the repetition of the Torah.

That is somewhat misleading. Moshe does not review the *entire* Torah. In fact, the parts he leaves out are quite striking. In this 30 chapter speech, he does not review even one story from Breishit, from Genesis. And no description of the story of Egypt. No descriptions of slavery. Or the plagues. Or the splitting of the Sea. Or of the instructions for the Mishkan. And there is almost no mention of most of the book of Vayikra relating to Tuma and Tahara and Offerings.

So, to call the book Deuto, the review of the Torah, is not accurate; the review is of *some*, selected stories and laws of the Torah.

Let's say we were delivering this speech.

Or were Moshe's speech writer. We know what he wants to convey: I am not going to be with the people in this grand adventure of conquering the land of Israel. And more importantly I will not be with them in setting up our unique Jewish society in the land. And living in a way to gain G-d's favour so we can be successful.

Moshe will get to addressing the challenges they are to face in life, in faith, in confrontation with idolatry of the land, in conducting war.

But it will take him until the next parsha to begin to address those weighty topics.

Our parsha is his introduction. How does Moshe want to begin this long speech? Where do you start?

The book of Devarim is Moshe's great speech before taking leave of his people; Parshat Devarim is the introduction to that speech.



1ST ALIYA (DEVARIM 1:1-10)

Moshe related the events of the journey, the 11-day journey from Chorev to Kadesh Barnea. On 1 Shevat, year 40, Moshe related to the people all that G-d had instructed him about them. This was after the defeats of Sichon and Og, on the banks of the Jordan. He related: G-d instructed us to travel from Sinai and to take the land of Israel, the land promised to the forefathers. And I said: these people are now so numerous that I cannot bear them alone.

Moshe begins his parting words with a description of the journey to the Land of Israel. Not with the story of the Exodus. Not

even with the story of the giving of the Torah. Certainly not with any stories from Breishit.

You could have begun with religious beliefs. What we believe in. What are the most important mitzvot. Our origin story – Avraham. Or the other origin story, G-d's intervention in history to take us out of Egypt, an historical basis to our faith in Him.

No. His emphasis is the journey to the Land. And to get to the journey he begins on the days following Mt. Sinai, when we were ready to go to the Land.



2ND ALIYA (1:11-21)

I said then: Let's choose wise people to lead you. You agreed that this was a good idea. Wise leaders were appointed over thousands, hundreds, tens and officers of enforcement as well. I charged the judges saying: listen and rule fairly without bias. I commanded you in all the things you are to do. We traveled the desert to the Mount of the Emori, Kadesh Barnea. There I said: let's go without fear and take the Land.

It is curious that the first story Moshe feels a need to review is the appointing of the various upper court and lower court judges. After all, it doesn't seem to have anything to do with the march to the Land. In fact, there are other stories that do occur as part of the march, like the complaints for water that are simply skipped. Why mention the appointment of judges?

There is a twist of phrase from this story to the next. And that is perhaps why it is here.

In this story, I had an idea, to appoint judges. And you liked it. You agreed.

In the next story, you had an idea, to send spies. And I liked it. I agreed.

Moshe is emphasizing human agency. There are decisions that we need to make. Me, as leader. And you, as people. In our

decisions, sometimes we get it right. And sometimes we get it wrong. We have to take full responsibility for all our decisions. The ones we get right. And the ones we get wrong.



3RD ALIYA (1:22-38)

You approached me to send spies to scout out the Land. I thought that was a good idea, choosing the leaders of the tribes for the task. They toured and returned with fruits of the land exclaiming: The Land G-d is giving us is good. But you refused to go and rebelled against G-d saying: these have damaged our resolve telling us of the large people and the fortified cities. I insisted that G-d will fight the battle as He has done until now. But you did not trust in G-d Who has been guiding you by cloud and fire. You were told that all who do not believe they can enter the Land, will not enter the Land. And I too was told I would not enter; Yeshoshua will lead the people into the Land.

The first story Moshe tells is the spies. Failure.

But he abbreviates it. He relates: the spies brought back a good report. And you people decided you couldn't take the Land.

Wait, that's not what I remember. The spies came back with a long and eventually pessimistic report. In Bamidbar, it sounds like their bad report started a cascade of fear. Here, Moshe places the guilt at the feet of the people.

Perhaps Moshe is deliberately emphasizing responsibility. Just like I, Moshe says, admitted I needed help adjudicating all of you, you too need to know that it was not the fault of the spies but of you that we spent 40 years in the desert.

Blame for national failures cannot be laid only at the feet of the leaders. The people need to also bear full responsibility for their

decisions.

So how does Moshe begin his great speech? Responsibility. I admitted my weakness and agreed to a system of judges. You too need to accept your responsibility for this great adventure in the Land to succeed.



4TH ALIYA (1:39-2:1)

Upon hearing that you would not enter the Land, you regretted your sin. You said: let us go to the Land. But you were warned that G-d would not be with you in this and the Emori chased you away like bees to the region of Seir. We dwelt in Kadesh and Har Seir for a long time.

Here is lesson two. When we follow the Divine plan, we will succeed. When we venture off on our own, devoid of Divine support, then we will be chased away like bees. The image of the people scampering away as if chased by bees is satirical; with Divine assistance you have no defense. You ran defenseless, arms flailing.



5TH ALIYA (2:2-30)

It was time to travel northward. Do not confront the descendants of your brother Esav who dwell in Seir. Circle their land; pay for the food and water that you need from them. In addition, do not confront Moav for it is the rightful possession of the descendants of Lot. Past the land of Moav is Amon; do not confront Amon for it too is the rightful possession of the descendants of Lot. The region north of the Arnon is the land of Sichon and Og; those lands I have given to you. I offered to Sichon to pass through his land, but he refused; G-d made him stubborn so that we could take his land.

This description of our family ties with Esav and Lot is surprising; don't engage in war with Esav's descendants nor Lot's descendants. They are relatives. And we are to give

regard to those relatives. Yaakov's brother Esav settled in Seir. He deserves brotherly deference and hence leave him alone. Moav and Amon are nations from Lot, Avraham's nephew. Leave them alone as well; they are your relatives. Brothers, even when pursuing entirely different legacies, remain brothers nonetheless.



6TH ALIYA (2:31-3:14)

G-d told us to take the lands of Sichon in war. The lands were conquered up to the Gilad. Og confronted us in the region toward the Bashan and he too was conquered. Their lands were given to Reuven, Gad and half the tribe of Menashe.

These confrontations with Sichon and Og are the last stories in the book of Bamidbar, not too long ago. Moshe relates these stories right at the beginning of his long speech, even though if he were reviewing our history chronologically, they would have to wait 25 chapters. He does so to begin his long speech with success and with encouragement. Even though we spent 40 years in the desert as a result of the spies, but we then marched to the Land. With success.

Moshe will eventually want to warn the people, chastise them, tell them of their future failures: but that can all wait. Start with encouragement.



7TH ALIYA (3:15-22)

The lands on the east of the Jordan including the Gilad and the lands from the Kineret to the Dead Sea were settled by Reuven and Gad and half of Menashe. I instructed these tribes to join the battle for the Land of Israel and then to return to their lands.

This is a very large patch of land: on the east side of the Jordan from the Dead Sea all the way up to the Hermon has been conquered

and will be settled by the Jewish people. These early victories and Moshe's repetition of their stories allows Moshe to begin his long directives to the people on a high note, an optimistic one. The description until here is how we got to where we are. Now he will focus on the much more crucial directives: how to live *in* the Land.

HAFTORAH: YESHAYAHU 1:1-27

This week's *haftorah* is the third of a series of three "*haftarot* of affliction." Yeshayahu conveys to the Jewish people of a G-dly vision he experienced, chastising the residents of Judah and Jerusalem for having rebelled against G-d. He criticized them for repeating their errors and not engaging in *teshuva*. *"Woe to a sinful nation, a people heavy with iniquity, evildoing seed, corrupt children. They forsook G-d; they provoked the Holy One of Israel."* The navi employs harsh words by comparing the Jewish leaders to the rulers of Sodom and Gomorrah.

Yeshayahu then speaks gentler words, encouraging the people to repent sincerely and to perform acts of justice and *chesed* towards the needy, orphans and widows, and promising them the best of the land in return for their obedience. *"If your sins prove to be like crimson, they will become white as snow; if they prove to be as red as crimson dye, they shall become as wool."* The *haftorah* concludes with an uplifting promise that G-d will one day reestablish Israel's judges and leaders, when *"Zion shall be redeemed through justice and her penitents through righteousness."*

The first word of the *haftorah* is "*Chazon*" ("The vision"). The Shabbat when this *haftorah* is read, the Shabbat before Tisha b'Av, is thus called "Shabbat Chazon," the "Shabbat of the Vision." ■



STATS

44th of the 54 sedras; first of 11 in Devarim.

Written on 196.5 lines (rank: 26th). 5 parshiyot; 1 open, 4 closed.

105 pEsumim - ranks 32, 6th in Devarim tied with Chaye Sara, but larger.

1548 words - ranks 26th, 6th in Devarim.

5972 letters - ranks 24, 5th in Devarim tied with Vayeishev, but smaller.

Jump in rankings from pEsumim to words & letters due to relatively long pesukim.



MITZVOT

2 mitzvot - both prohibitions.

One of only three sedras that have only prohibitions (LO TAASEI).

Vayishlach and B'shalach are the other two, with one LAV each.

Contains 6 of the 613 mitzvot, all positive. One of only six sedras that have only positive mitzvot.

**It is with great sorrow
that we announce the passing of**

Annette Lauer a"h
CHANA BAT YITZCHOK EIZIK a"h

Formerly of Elizabeth, NJ

Leonard Lauer, Rechovot
Sharon Lauer, East Brunswick, NJ
Gershon Markowitz, Har Nof

**Shiva until Sunday Morning
in Rechovot**