



ALIYA-BY-ALIYA SEDRA SUMMARY

RABBI REUVEN TRADBURKS
RCA ISRAEL REGION

PARSHAT RE'EH

Parshat Re'eh begins a section filled with mitzvot. In the next 3 parshiot there are 170 Mitzvot, ¼ of all the mitzvot of the Torah.

In the flow of Moshe's speech, he pivots from a discussion of how we got to where we are to a discussion of how we are to live in the Land. No more speaking of the challenges in your conquest of the Land; now we are speaking of the Jewish society we are to create in the Land.

In the first 3 parshiot of Devarim Moshe conversed with the people. He addressed their doubts and concerns and reviewed our history to learn its lessons. If you doubt you can take the Land, remember the sin of the spies; don't repeat their skepticism. If you doubt your ability, remember your victories over Sichon and Og. If you are worried that the nations are too powerful for you, remember the wonders of Egypt; He will do what is necessary. If you doubt your worth, remember Sinai; He chose to speak with you, His people. And if you think you are superior, remember your failing of the golden calf.

In these first 3 parshiot Moshe converses with the people, addressing their thoughts, doubts, and concerns. Moshe assuages those uncertainties through recounting the lessons of their journey to here.

Now Moshe begins to address the society we want to build in the Land. Less conversation, more instructions, proscriptions.

What are the pillars of this new Jewish

society? What are its principles, its values?

In a word: ethical monotheism. Our parsha outlines that belief in One G-d is the heart of our new Jewish society. And generosity to others. Ethical monotheism. We will get to judiciary, legislature and executive branch in the upcoming parshiot. But ours is the foundation. Belief. And behavior.



1ST ALIYA (DEVARIM 11:26-12:10)

I place before you blessing as a consequence of keeping mitzvot; and curse as a consequence for not. You are entering the Land and will establish yourself there. These are the laws: rid the Land of idols whether they are on mountains, hills or under trees. And hence uproot service of them. Do not serve your G-d in many places rather serve Him in the one place I choose. That is where you shall bring all your offerings. And that is where you shall rejoice.

The first pillar of our Jewish society is, well, the first two of the Ten Commandments. One G-d. And rejection of idols. The directive to root out idols makes sense.

But what is noticeable is the insistence on one central place of national service of G-d. Offerings are to be brought only there. This is in stark contrast to the plethora of idols on hill tops and under trees all over the Land. The one central place reinforces that there is but one G-d.



2ND ALIYA (12:11-28)

The place that G-d will choose to dwell shall be the place you bring your offerings. And you shall rejoice there with your family, your workers and the Levi.

Now, you may consume meat wherever you dwell, but not as holy offerings. The holy things are to be done in this one place only. When you enjoy expansive borders and want to consume meat, you may do so without any restrictions of tuma. However, do not consume the blood. You may not offer holy things and vows in your locale, but only in the place He chooses.

Sacrifices must only be brought in the Temple in Jerusalem (or the Mishkan before that). But you may eat meat, though not its blood, outside of the Temple.

The permission to eat meat out of the Temple is emphasized. I wonder why. Is the Torah trying to make a philosophical statement, like, remember that though you are subservient to G-d, you are the crown of creation and have every right to exercise your dominance over animals?

Or perhaps to contrast the two contexts of consumption. Eating meat out of the Temple, while permitted is consumption, earthy. Eating meat of a sacrifice is rejoicing in G-d's Presence. Do not confuse pleasure with simcha. Eating meat is pleasure; basking in G-d's Presence is simcha.



3RD ALIYA (12:29-13:19)

When you become settled in the Land, be wary of the snare of attraction of the religions in the Land. Though you are tempted to want to learn how they serve their gods and to borrow from that, do not do it. We have ours; do not add, nor subtract from our own. If a prophet predicts future events with accuracy but instructs people to follow a false god, do not listen to him. You are to follow G-d. If your brother, son, daughter or even wife or best friend try to convince you to follow an idol, do not listen to them. They are to be put to death for

attempting to sway people to idol worship; you are not to shield them. If an entire city worships idols, it is to be destroyed.

Idol worship will lure you, hook you in 4 ways: the beauty of the practices, the power of the charismatic prophet, the draw of the people closest to us, and the sway of the crowd.

The religions of the world have their attraction. There are many noble practices, much grandeur, inspiration and beauty. You may wonder perhaps if our services can be enhanced by gospel singers or the majesty of the Church organ. Don't go looking for their best. For 2 reasons: our practices are ours. We serve Him in the way He says. And second, in looking at their practices, you risk being drawn to switch sides and simply stay with theirs.

And people influence people. The prophet, who has earned authority through predicting the future, has great sway. Don't listen to him if he professes a belief in idols.

So too, those closest to us, relatives, spouses, best friends. People listen to people they trust. But not if they are drawing you to idols.

And the power of the group – social pressure, an entire city. For all of these, it is difficult to turn against them in judgment. We protect our leaders, our family. We know this all too well; there is a great pull to protect the person in power or the family member, while allowing them to continue their damaging ways.



4TH ALIYA (14:1-21)

The laws of kashrut: animals with a split hoof and chew their cud may be eaten. Fish with fins and scales. Birds that are predatory are listed as not kosher. And do not consume an animal that died on its own, nor cook a kid in its mother's milk.

The laws of kashrut have already been given in Parshat Shemini. They are repeated here perhaps as a statement of Jewish difference. We believe differently. We eat differently.

And following immediately after the allure of idol worship, perhaps these laws are placed here as they create a barrier to social contact with the peoples of the Land. If you can't eat together, it's much harder to socialize. Food is the lubricant of social intimacy. The kashrut laws set us apart, limiting social contact and so protecting us from slipping into idol worship.



5TH ALIYA (14:22-29)

Maaser sheni: 10% of your produce is to be eaten in proximity to the Temple area. If this is too much to transport, exchange it for money. The money must be used for food in the holy place, shared with others. And you will rejoice before G-d.

Maaser sheni is an unusual mitzvah. Teruma is an amount given to Kohanim, as a tax to support the Kohanim. Maaser is 10% given to the Leviim to support them.

But Maaser sheni is 10% of the remainder of the crop to be eaten in the holy place, in proximity to the Temple area. In Shilo that meant within eyesight of the Temple area, in Jerusalem it meant within the city walls. It does not need to be eaten by the owner; but it does need to be eaten in Jerusalem.

There are 2 implications to this mitzvah: 1) the farmer is forced to go regularly to experience the holiness of the mikdash and 2) Jerusalem becomes full of produce.

If 10% of all produce must end up in Jerusalem, the prices fall due to supply. There will always be plenty of food for cheap in Jerusalem. This is fascinating social engineering; an indirect way of creating inexpensive food for the needy.

This is a double mitzvah: a push to the farmer to stay connected to holiness. And a safety net for the needy; Jerusalem becomes a breadbasket, city of plenty, of surplus and hence of help to those in need.



6TH ALIYA (15:1-18)

Shemita for loans: the 7th year cancels all loans. G-d will bless you in the Land so that there will be no poor. When one who is needy approaches you, open your hand and give what he needs. Do not withhold a loan as the shemita year approaches knowing it will be canceled. Rather give him, for there will always be needy people. A slave shall also go free in the 7th year. Give him freely upon his release. Should he want to remain a slave to you, he may do so. Don't resent sending him free, for he worked for you for 6 years; G-d will bless you for your compliance.

This aliya and the one before form a second pillar of society in the Land: care for others. The first pillar was a G-d central society, monotheism, expressed by a central Temple where all offerings are brought. Care for others is the next pillar.

The canceling of loans every 7 years is a form of bankruptcy; allowing a fresh start for one who has fallen on hard times. When someone is in trouble and needs a loan, don't be a loan shark, a predator, swooping down on the desperate. Rather, if he can't pay, let it go. Give him a fresh start.

As is freeing the slave. A fresh start.



7TH ALIYA (15:19-16:17)

A first-born animal shall be brought as an offering. Should it be blemished, it is consumed by the owner. Pesach: the Pesach offering must be brought in the place He chooses. Shavuot: You and all yours shall rejoice in the place

He chooses. Sukkot: You shall celebrate for 7 days at the time of the harvest and shall be joyful. On these holidays one appears before G-d and celebrates with what we have been blessed with.

The 3 regalim or pilgrimage holidays are religious social engineering. The Jew needs to spend time in Jerusalem regularly. That experience makes a difference. We all know that. Moving out of our routine and experiencing a different, more rarified and holy place leaves its mark. While we are always before G-d, the regular journey to Jerusalem creates a regular bond with rarefied holiness.

We see it in our own time; oh, how privileged we are to see the impact of the richness of our modern-day Jerusalem on the Jews of the world. How many of us had our religious journey sparked in these streets of Jerusalem?

The pilgrimage holidays are social engineering: people return home as different people after the experience of the Mikdash.

HAFTORAH YESHAYAHU 54:11- 55:5

This week's *haftorah* is the third of a series of seven "*Haftarot* of Consolation." Hashem addresses the "afflicted and storm-tossed" Jerusalem "who has not been comforted," assuring her that she, and her people, will be restored to full glory. The foundation, walls and ground of Yerushalayim will be laid with precious stones. Her children will be "disciples of Hashem," and will enjoy abundant peace. Any weapon engineered against her will fail.

The prophet then invites the thirsty to acquire "water," namely those who are thirsty for spirituality should study the quenching words of Torah. He promises the nation an

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everlasting covenant similar to that made with King David. This is also an allusion to Mashiach, David's descendant, who will be revered by all of the nations of the world. ■



STATS

47th of the 54 sedras; 4th of 11 in Devarim.
257.8 lines in a Torah (rank: 4th).
20 Parshiyot - 5 open; 15 closed.
126 pesukim - ranks 13th (1st in Devarim).
1932 words - ranks 7th (first in Devarim).
7442 letters - ranks 7th (first in Devarim).



MITZVOT

55 of 613; 17 positive, 38 prohibition.
That's almost 9% of the Torah's mitzvot; only Ki Teitzei & Emor have more.