



ALIYA-BY-ALIYA SEDRA SUMMARY

RABBI REUVEN TRADBURKS
RCA ISRAEL REGION

PARSHAT SHOFTIM

Parshat Shoftim is the 2nd of 3 parshiot that have a total of 170 mitzvot. Shoftim has 41 of those. Sefer Devarim has 3 sections; this is the middle parsha of the middle section. The first section, Parshiot Devarim, Va'etchanan and Eikev were Moshe's narrative of the lessons of the past. Don't be skeptical about your ability to enter the Land; that was the sin of the spies and you don't want to repeat their fate. He went over the lessons of the pivotal stories of the Torah: Mt. Sinai, the golden calf, the spies, manna as well as others. The last of the 3 sections in Devarim returns to preparation to enter the Land, including 4 very short parshiot. These middle 3 parshiot are nation building; they express the vision of what type of society we want to build in the Land of Israel. Last week we saw the introduction of the first pillar of the Jewish society: the establishment of a monotheistic society, including the centrality of what will be Jerusalem and avoidance of the lure of idol worship. We saw the pillar of chesed and mitzvot legislating care for the needy in Shemita and in Maaser Shenit: in a word, ethical monotheism. Shoftim is the building of national institutions: the

judiciary, the executive and the legislature, including courts, the king, prophets and proper conduct of war. While there are many laws introduced, it is all in a natural flow, outlining the crucial aspects of all these branches of government. A theme that animates many of these national institutions is not only their roles, but as importantly their limits; what we call today the checks and balances of power.



1ST ALIYA (DEVARIM 16:18 - 17:13)

Courts: Establish courts and be vigilant in fairness; do not show favoritism or accept bribes for they blur good judgment. Do not plant a tree next to the altar, nor establish a stone monument, nor offer blemished sacrifices. If one is found to worship idols, examine the case carefully in court: guilt must be established through the testimony of witnesses. If established to be true, put that person to death and remove evil from your midst. Should a ruling be elusive, refer it to the higher court; its decision is binding. Do not deviate from its ruling.

Judiciary: What is stated here is the importance of fair and just courts; however, what it seeks to avoid is more important. No vigilantism. Don't fight the Lord's battles declaring "that person is worshipping idols. I will step into the breach and eliminate them. Who needs courts?" Ridding the Land of idol worship needs brakes. We need to rid the Land of the physical idols; but ridding the Land of the

Mazal Tov to

Greg & Chanie Geller and family

on the birth of their **grandson**



people, the idol worshippers, that must be done with care. It is not for me to step into the breach. The court system is a check and balance on religious zeal, G-d's warrior. A commitment to justice requires restraint of the people; you can't just do what you think is right. Defer to the wise judges.



2ND ALIYA (17:14-20)

King: When settled in the Land, appoint a Jewish king. He may not accumulate excessive horses, nor too many wives, nor silver and gold. He shall have his own Torah with him at all times in order to avoid self-aggrandizement and to ensure allegiance to the mitzvot.

Executive Branch: There are strengths and weaknesses in every system of governance known to man. Monarchy's weakness occurs when the King no longer serves the people, but serves his own interests. Hence, the checks and balances: a) limit the horses, meaning the power of the military b) limit wives, self indulgence and license and 3) limit gold, the greed of possessions. Rather, read the Torah. The King is to serve G-d and His people. And not to serve his own interests.



3RD ALIYA (18:1-5)

Kohen, Levi: The tribe of Levi, including Kohanim, shall not have a portion in the Land of Israel for the holy service is their lot. The Kohen, who serves G-d, shall be given portions of animals, produce and shearing.

These religious leaders are supported by a type of tax on the people. But with limits. No land. And only these portions. It is not what is given to support the Kohanim and Leviim; it is what is not. Every society supports its religious leaders. But make sure the power that comes with high religious office

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is not abused. You get support; but only this, not more. As the zealot must retreat and allow the courts to manage the idol worshipper. And as the king must retreat and limit his power and personal license to lust and wealth. So too, the religious leaders must retreat and serve G-d and the people; being supported albeit with modesty.



4TH ALIYA (18:6 - 12)

The Levi is permitted to serve in the Temple whenever he chooses. **Sorcery:** Avoid the practices of the people in the Land, such as child sacrifice, divination, omens, sorcery, communicating with the dead. Your allegiance is to G-d.

While the previous aliya gave checks and balances to the Kohen in accumulating wealth, when it comes to doing the service itself in the Temple, the Levi is welcomed whenever his heart stirs him. For that is his true task. When the heart stirs for corruption and abuse of position, it needs brakes. When the heart is stirred for Divine service, it is welcomed.

Legislature: The discussion here of sorcery and divination is an introduction to the legislature, the content of the law itself. Wouldn't legislation be so much easier if we knew the future? And even more basically, who are we to know what laws are wise and effective? If only we could tap into the secrets of the world, the hidden mysteries. There is a lot of mystery in our world. There are displays of unusual powers, inexplicable sources of knowledge, a world of unseen forces. Whether these powers are real or illusory is the stuff of debate. But it isn't for you. Stay away. The Torah requires powerful restraint. That is

not our source of truth. As the next aliya outlines, our source of truth is G-d through the prophet.



5TH ALIYA (18:13 - 19:13)

Prophet: While the people in the Land seek wisdom through magical techniques, you seek yours through G-d Himself. Although you said at Sinai that you did not want to hear His voice directly, nonetheless you have the Prophet to convey G-d's directives. Heed the words of the prophet, though not of the false prophet. The true prophet's predictions come true: not so for the false prophet. Prepare 3 cities on the east bank of the Jordan and 3 cities in the Land of Israel as refuge for the accidental murderer. He is not subject to the death penalty. Innocent blood ought not be spilled in the Land.

Our parsha has outlined the judiciary, the judges and the executive, the king. The legislature, the branch that creates the laws, is trickier; the source of our laws is G-d, related through the prophet. But within this little section is an expression of Moshe's humility. Because tradition maintains that the prophets after the time of Moshe are not to be legislators. They do not introduce new laws. All legislation rests in the hands of the rabbinic leaders. We saw that above: should a case be too difficult, refer it to the higher court and then you are bound by its decision. Law, from here on in, is in the hands of the rabbis, not in the hands of the prophet. When Moshe says here to heed the voice of the prophet, he is really speaking of himself. Prophets in the future will encourage, scold, criticize, and direct the people: but not with new ground. Moshe doesn't want to say

"listen to me and me alone". Rather, he says "Follow the laws of the true prophet". Which is Moshe.



6TH ALIYA (19:14 - 20:9)

Do not encroach over the borders of your property. **Testimony:** One witness is insufficient in court. Conniving witnesses who intend harm through their testimony shall themselves receive the harm they intended. **War:** Do not be afraid of the enemy in war, for G-d champions your battles. A specially appointed Kohen shall encourage the soldiers. In addition, he shall exempt some of the soldiers: those who have a new home, a new vineyard, a betrothed wife, or are afraid. These shall not demoralize the other soldiers.

Having outlined the judiciary, the executive and the legislature, one of the primary functions of the executive, the King, is to protect his people militarily. Some laws of war are outlined. Morale of the army is paramount. The Kohen's presence reminds the soldiers that they are G-d's army. Nonetheless, morale may be damaged by soldiers preoccupied with their personal worries. The Midrash maintains that a new home or a new vineyard is hardly sufficient reason to receive a draft exemption.

May the Torah learned from this issue of Torah Tidbits be לע"נ my father

משה בן צבי ז"ל

Moshe Goldstein ז"ל

on his 31st yearzeit, 3 Elul

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These are put there so that the one who is really plain scared can leave the battlefield and not demoralize the others, under the cover that perhaps he has a new vineyard. In so doing, the Torah spares the pride of the frightened soldier.



7TH ALIYA (20:10 - 21:9)

In approaching war, try peace first. But if refused, fight the war to the end, lest those who survive lead you astray. Do not destroy fruit trees while laying siege to a city. When a body is found dead in the field, the nearest city shall perform a ceremony declaring them not responsible for this death. The Land needs to be cleansed of innocent blood.

After the laws of war, the Torah circles back to one lone body found dead in the field. And the need to cleanse both the leadership and the Land of this innocent blood. This too is a kind of check and balance on the military. Oh, don't think we have a low regard for life. Loss of innocent life defiles the Land – and us. Embark on war with sobriety.

YESHAYAHU 51:12 - 52:12

This week's haftorah is the fourth of a series of seven "Haftarot of Consolation."

The recent haftorahs have alluded to the fear of the nation of Israel that perhaps they have been abandoned by God. In response, this week's haftorah begins with God's response: "I, indeed I, will comfort you.

After castigating Israel for forgetting their Creator, the prophet describes the suffering and tribulations which Israel has endured. However, the time has come for Israel's oppressors to drink the "cup of suffering."

Yeshayahu announces the good tidings of Redemption. "Burst out in song, sing together, O ruins of Jerusalem, for the Lord has consoled His people; He has redeemed Jerusalem."

The haftorah concludes by spotlighting the difference between the Egyptian Exodus, when the Israelites quickly hurried out of their exile, and the future Redemption: "For not with haste shall you go forth and not in a flurry of flight shall you go, for the Lord goes before you, and your rear guard is the God of Israel." ■



STATS

48th of the 54 sedras;

5th of 11 in Devarim.

Written on 191.6 lines - rank: 27.

18 Parshiyot; 3 open, 15 closed.

97 pesukim - rank: 36 - 7th in Devarim (tied with Tzav, but larger).

1523 words - rank: 28 - 7th in Devarim.

5590 letters - rank: 31 - 7th in Devarim.



MITZVOT

41 mitzvot - 14 positive, 27 prohibitions; ranks 6th among the sedras, in mitzvot.

The top 6 mitzva-sedras - contain 55% of the Torah's mitzvot (31 other sedras have the other 45%; 17 have none).

<p>פוליש Polishing & renewing of decks</p>	<p>ניקוי חבנים Cleaning of offices and Shuls</p>	<p>ניקוי שטיחים Carpet cleaning</p>	<p>ניקוי ספות Sofa cleaning</p>
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A SHORT VORT

BY RABBI CHANUCH YERES

Rav, Beit Knesset Beit Yisrael, Yemin Moshe

לא תטע לך אשרה כל עץ אצל מזבח ה' אלוך אשר תעשה לך (טז:כא)

"You shall not plant an Asheira, of any kind of tree, beside the altar of G-d." (16:21)

Why is the discussion of an Asheira (Idolatry) tree in proximity to the appointment of judges in this Parsha?

The Talmud (Sanhedrin 7b) quotes Reish Lakish who says, "He who appoints an incompetent judge over the community is as though he had planted an Asheira in Israel,"

What is this moral connection between an incompetent corrupt judge and an Asheira tree?

Rabbi Chaim Soloveitchik (1853-1918) mentioned that any idolatry is recognizable. You see an idol, you distance yourself.

Not so by an Asheira tree. Externally it looks like any other majestic tree, only internally was it sanctioned as idolatry. Similarly, a corrupt judge looks externally like a respected honest judge but internally he is corrupt and mistaking many.

~ Shabbat Shalom