



ALIYA-BY-ALIYA SEDRA SUMMARY

RABBI REUVEN TRADBURKS
RCA ISRAEL REGION

PARSHAT NITZAVIM-VAYEILECH

The Torah ends with 4 very short parshiot. The last parsha of the Torah is read on Simchat Torah. After our double parsha, we have only the short parsha of Ha'azinu. So, we are virtually at the end of the Torah.

Let's frame our parsha in the context of the book of Devarim. Moshe has taken us from past, to present, to future. Moshe is standing on the banks of the Jordan, knowing he will not be with the people in their entry to the Land. The entire book of Devarim is Moshe's instructions to the people. He begins with the immediate fears and concerns of the people; how will we be successful in conquering the Land? He reviews the past; lessons to be learned, errors to be avoided, successes to remember. You will be successful. He then paints a picture of the society of ethical monotheism to be created in the Land. And the national institutions of legislature, judiciary and executive. He has gone from the past, to immediate present, to imminent future. Then last week he pivoted to the distant future; the exile that will result inevitably from disloyalty. Though not yet in the Land, Moshe gives a chilling

description of exile from the Land.

And in our parsha, he looks into the even more distant future; the end of the exile and the return to the Land. Hopeful. Optimistic. He has gone from assurance, to dread and back to confidence. And has taken care to articulate to the people, before he takes leave of them, his profound belief in their ultimate ability to return. That in the deepest recesses of their heart is their desire to connect to their G-d. Moshe believes in us.

Although this double parsha has but 70 verses, the emotional impact is hard to match.



1ST ALIYA (DEVARIM 29:9 - 28)

The Brit of Arvot Moav. All the people are gathered, men, women, children, water carriers and woodchoppers to enter the covenant; that G-d will be our G-d and we will be His people. As was said to the Avot. This covenant is with you here today and those not here. Should there be amongst you those chasing idols, rationalizing that they are free to follow their hearts; the consequence of the special bond of this covenant is that your disloyalty, your chasing idol worship will be met with Divine wrath. The destruction of this Land because of your unfaithfulness will be so profound people will look at it and be shocked by its utter desolation. They will recognize that your disloyalty resulted in this desolation and in your

Mazal Tov to
Mike Harris and family on the marriage
of his daughter **Shoshana**

being tossed out of this Land.

The covenant is simple. You. And me. You, G-d will be my G-d. And we will be Your people. It is crucially important to reduce the Torah to this simple, though profound, bond. Sure, there are lots of mitzvot. Some we'll get right. Some we'll mess up with. But, after all the detailed mitzvot, it is really You and me. The Jew lives a life walking with the Creator. We are bound together. That bond expresses itself in mitzvot. Certainly. But, Moshe says, it is the walk with the Creator that is our lot in life. A privileged lot indeed.



2ND ALIYA (30:1 - 6)

When you are cast out of the Land to the 4 corners of the earth, you will take to heart your fate – and return to G-d. He will return to you, returning to you to gather you from the far-flung places. Even if you are at the ends of the earth, He will gather you and take you from there, to bring you back to this Land.

This is the most beautiful paragraph in the entire Torah. It is so good it is split in the middle, to savor it. It is called Parshat HaTeshuva, the section of Return. The word “return” appears 7 times. We to Him. He to us. We take a step; He steps to us. But our first return is described as “we take it to heart”. Heart murmurings are the beginning of teshuva. And He is our cardiologist, He knows our murmurings, as faint as they may be. Once He senses those murmurings, He empowers us, Gives us the strength, the will to build on our deepest pining. He dances with us, but waits for us to take the first step. Then He gives us more strength and more. Just take that step.

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3RD ALIYA (30:7 - 14)

And He will implant in you love of Him. And you will return to Him. And He will be thrilled with you because your return is with sincerity, a full heart. For this mitzvah is not sublime, as if needing one to ascend the heavens or cross the ocean to retrieve it. Rather it is very close; on your lips and in your heart.

Moshe uses words of affection. Love, love of Hashem. Heart, all your heart. Moshe does not want to be only the teacher of halacha. He wants to be the teacher of our inner life as well. We need tutelage in not only *what to do*, but also in *how to feel*. Shake off your inhibitions. Let Him in, with love, with the deepest feelings of your heart, every day. The language is noticeably more emotive than the rest of the Torah. Moshe, as he is departing as leader, and departing from this world desperately wants to convey his deepest feelings and to reach our deepest emotions.

And it is not in heaven. The “it” may be understood to be referring to the entire Torah. As if to say, “I know the Torah looks daunting; but it is not, it is the real you.” Or it could be referring to Teshuva. As if to say, “Change looks daunting; but it is

not, it is the real you.” Moshe is expressing his faith in us. That deep down, everyone has a connection to G-d and to the Jewish people. That is exactly what this verse says; we don’t need to adjust, to adapt to a belief in G-d. We need to be sensitive to, to plumb our real selves, to dig deep and discover ourselves. It is close: on our lips and in our heart.



4TH ALIYA (30:15 - 31:6)

Life and good, death and evil lie before you. Life is a consequence of loyalty to the mitzvot. Destruction awaits lack of loyalty. Heaven and earth stand witness: life and death, blessing and curse lie before you. Choose life. Moshe goes. And speaks to the entire people. I am 120 years old. I will not bring you into the Land; G-d will lead you. And Yehoshua will lead you. G-d will do for you as He did with Sichon and Og. Be strong and firm, do not be afraid or worried; G-d will be with you. He will not let go of you or leave you.

These words are the last of Moshe’s long speech. He will move on to speak of transition of leadership. But these last words are like a tincture, a dilution. After all is said and done, the stakes of this grand venture of mitzvot are nothing short of life and death. And with these words, Moshe prepares to take leave of the people. Nothing more to say. Choose life.



5TH ALIYA (31:7 - 13)

Moshe called Yehoshua, and in front of the entire people charged him to be strong and of good courage. For G-d will be with you; He will not abandon you, so be not afraid. And Moshe wrote the Torah and gave it to the bearers

**May the Torah learned
from this issue of Torah Tidbits
be in loving memory of**
רבקה בת יוסף ע"ה
RIFKA EDELSTEIN A"H
**beloved wife, mother, grandmother
and great grandmother**
on her 14th yearzeit - 25 Elul
The Rosner, Edelstein, Sokoloff families

of the Aron. **Hakhel:** Every 7 years, during Sukkot, when all Israel gathers, read this Torah, so all will learn to have awe and observe the Torah.

Moshe encourages Yehoshua a lot – be *chazak*, strong, and *amatz*, mighty. Don't be afraid. Moshe is addressing Yehoshua's fears. For although there is a promise to the Jewish people, who knows if I, Yehoshua, am deserving to be their leader. Maybe I am unworthy. That is the healthy humility that every leader should display. Who am I to lead this great nation?

And the mitzvah of Hakhel continues Moshe's transition of leadership. He is taking leave. Yehoshua is being invested. Why stick in the mitzvah of Hakhel, of reading and teaching the people to fear G-d? Perhaps, and this is conjecture, the mitzvah of Hakhel is not only to teach the *people* but to teach the *King*. The *King* is to read the Torah in front of the people. Perhaps this is the Torah's version of the 7-year itch. Leaders, businesses, institutions often move in 7-year cycles. After 7 years, take stock. Where are you? Where are you going? Are you on track? Moshe is instructing Yehoshua. You are to lead the people. But as a servant of G-d. Lots will happen as a leader that may make you overly confident, haughty, maybe fearful, pessimistic. Every 7 years, take the Torah and read it;

take stock, publicly. You are the King; but not the King of Kings. You are His servant, serving His people.



6TH ALIYA (31:14 - 19)

G-d calls Moshe and Yehoshua.

A cloud appears. G-d says: this people will seek idols and abandon my covenant. I will leave them. I will hide my Face from them and they will feel I have abandoned them. I will surely Hide Myself from them. Write this song. Teach them this, so it shall be testimony for them.

This aliya turns rough. This is now not Moshe speaking, but G-d speaking to Moshe and Yehoshua. The Jews will rebel. And Hashem will withdraw, will leave the Jews subject to whatever calamities befall them. The greatest theological mystery is contained in this one verse: "I will hide My Face from you." Chilling. And it is repeated: I will surely hide My Face. The greatest theological challenge, posed in our time by the unfathomable tragedy of the Holocaust, must grapple with this Divine eclipse – Hiding His Face. When and why does He Hide His Face? The Torah states it but does not explain it. And while Jewish history is replete with tragedies, seemingly moments of this Divine eclipse, at least in our time we are warmed by the opposite: we who have returned to His Land are warmed by the Shining of His Face upon us.



7TH ALIYA (31:20 - 30)

I will bring the people to the Land, but they will respond to

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their success with rebellion. Let this song be at the ready for when this occurs. Moshe wrote the song, teaching it to the people. He charged Yehoshua again to be strong.

Moshe commanded the Leviim to place the Torah on the side of the Aron, as a permanent testimony. For, I know this people and they are stubborn and cantankerous. Gather all the leaders so I can charge them, for I am sure that following my death, there will be disloyalty. And Moshe spoke the words of the song to the people.

Moshe is generous to Yehoshua. As if to say, “when things turn ugly, don’t take the blame. All you can do is lead. Whether the people follow or whether they rebel is not of your doing. Be strong.” Generosity to the next leader, doing all to help them succeed is the sign of a leader who leads not for his own ego, fearing the next guy will be better than him, but is the sign of a leader who leads as a servant of the people, only wanting their success.

YESHAYAHU 61:10 - 63:9

This week’s *haftorah* is the seventh and final installment of a series of seven “*Haftarot* of Consolation.” The prophet begins on a high note, describing the great joy that we will experience with the Final Redemption, comparing it to the joy of a newly married couple.

Yeshayahu then declares his refusal to passively await the Redemption: “For Zion’s sake I will not remain silent, and for Jerusalem’s sake I will not be still, until her righteousness emerges like shining light...” He implores the stones of Yerushalayim not to be silent, day or night, until G-d restores

Jerusalem and establishes it in glory.

The Haftorah then recounts Hashem’s oath to eventually redeem Zion, when the Jews will praise G-d in Yerushalayim. The haftorah also contains a description of the punishment Hashem will mete out to Edom and the enemies of Israel.

Yeshayahu concludes with the famous statement:

“In all [Israel’s] afflictions, He, too, is afflicted, and the angel of His presence redeemed them...”

Like a loving father who shares the pain of his child, G-d, too, shares the pain of His people, and awaits Redemption along with them. ■



STATS

Nitzavim

51st of the 54 sedras; 8th of 11 in Devarim.

Written on 87 lines in a Torah (rank: 52).

4 Parshiyot; 1 open, 3 closed 40 p’sukim - ranks 53 (10th in Devarim).

657 words - ranks 51 (8th in Devarim).

2575 letters - ranks 51 (8th in Devarim).

Vayeilech

52nd of the 54 sedras; 9th of 11 Devarim.

Written on 72 lines in a Torah (rank: 53).

3 Parshiyot; 2 open, 1 closed.

30 p’sukim - ranks 54th (11th in Devarim).

553 words - ranks 53rd (10th in Devarim).

2123 letters - ranks 53rd (10th in Devarim).

Shortest sedra in number of pesukim; longest pesukim in the whole Torah.



MITZVOT

Nitzavim - No Mitzvot.

Vayeilech - 2 positive mitzvot.