

Snapshot Torah



GUIDE TO THE WEEKLY PARSHA

ISSUE 42

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VA'ETCHANAN

16th Av 5775

Kohen - First Aliya:

Chapter 3, verse 23 – Chapter 4, verse 4

- ✚ Moshe Relives the moment when he pleaded with Hashem to allow him entry into Israel but Hashem refuses. Instead Hashem did allow Moshe to stand on top of a mountain to view the whole land from afar where he tells him that Yehoshua (Joshua) will appointed to lead the people in his stead.
- ✚ Moshe explains to Bnai Yisrael what to do and how to behave when they enter the Promised Land.
- ✚ Moses instructs the people to follow Hashem's Torah, and never to add to or detract from it

Levi - Second Aliya:

Chapter 4, verses 5 - 40

- ✚ Moshe warns the nation not to forget the Torah's revelation and all the miracles they witnessed at Mount Sinai.
- ✚ Worshiping any forms of graven images is totally forbidden and would result in exile and annihilation. However in his mercy, Hashem would eventually forgive them and allow them to return once more.

Sh'lilshi - Third Aliya:

Chapter 4, verses 41 - 49

- ✚ Moshe sets aside three (Ir Miklat) cities of refuge on the western bank of the Jordan River: Betzer, Ramot and Gilad.
- ✚ These cities are to be used to house anyone who has accidentally killed another in order to keep them safe.

R'VI' - Fourth Aliya:

Chapter 5, verses 1 - 17 and

Chamishi - Fifth Aliya:

Chapter 5, verse 18 - Chapter 6, verse 3

- ✚ Moshe reminds Bnai Yisrael what occurred at Mount Sinai and he stood between them and Hashem, because they were afraid of the fire that had engulfed the mountain.
- ✚ The Ten Statements (Commandments) are repeated to remind Bnai Yisrael that Hashem's covenant to them is eternal and not just for those who were physically present at the time of the original revelation.

Shishi - Sixth Aliya:

Chapter 6, verses 4 - 25

- ✚ The first paragraph of the Shema is recited here.
- ✚ Moshe expresses all the wonderful things both agriculturally and in construction that Bnai Yisrael is going to receive after they've conquered the land as long as they don't forget it was Hashem who had given it to them.
- ✚ Moses instructs the nation what to respond to their children who might inquire why they observe all the commandments: "We were slaves in Egypt, and Hashem took us out in order that we serve Him, so that we could reap the rewards for doing so."

Sh'vi'i - Seventh Aliya:

Chapter 7, verses 1 - 11

- ✚ Moshe reassures his people, although the seven nations who currently occupy the land of Israel are strong, they will be no match for them.
- ✚ Finally Moshe warns Bnai Yisrael about the prohibition of intermarriage because Hashem has chosen them over all the other nations to be Hashem's holy people.

Haftorah – YISHAYAH (ISAIAH) Chapter 40 verses 1 to 26

OVERVIEW:

- ✚ This week's Haftorah begins with Hashem's encouraging and inspiring the prophets by revealing that Jerusalem's period of golus (exile) has been fulfilled and that all past sins have been forgiven.
- ✚ Yishayah describes some of the miraculous events that will unfold with the onset of the messianic era, such as the return of the exiles to Jerusalem, the revelation of Hashem's glory to the world etc.
- ✚ Yishayah comforts the people, by reassuring them that Hashem has always had and always will love, care and look after his chosen nation.

LINK TO SEDRA READING:

- ✚ This is the first of the seven 'Prophecies of comfort' which are read between the ninth of Av and Rosh Hashanah.
- ✚ The Haftorah begins with the words "You should be comforted" describing the bright future that Bnai Yisrael are destined to receive.
- ✚ Va'etchanan is always read the Shabbat after the fast of Av because it contains the ten statements, symbolizing the fact that our sadness has ended and we can once again resume in embracing Hashem's torah with joy and happiness.

WEEKLY DISCUSSION:

Incorporated within Moshe's retrospective view of all the events that had occurred over the past forty years in the midbar (desert) is the second recitation of the Ten Commandments. If you compare this account to the one we read back in the book of Shemot (Exodus), you will notice that there are a few subtle differences between the two. For example in the fourth commandment it quotes 'Zachor (remember) the Shabbat' in Parsha Yithro and 'Shamor (keep / guard) the Shabbat in this week's sedra. These variances maybe small but surely Hashem's words, like the time of the day, are supposed to be perfect. So why do we have two written versions.

One tradition was that Hashem only uttered a single word at Sinai, which constituted both meanings of 'Zachor and Shamor' in the translation and so for us to comprehend both connotations we had to read it in both contexts. This I understand but there is also a variance in the reason given for why we must keep this commandment which needs to be explained also.

The first explanation is very clear and explicit as it uses the same terminology found at the beginning of the torah and the story of creation. "In six days the Lord made heaven and earth and sea, and all that is in them, and He rested on the seventh day; therefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath and sanctified it." Proving to the skeptic's that this not just a symbolic narration but should be taken literally. However a completely different reason is given in today's reading. "In order that you remember, you were slaves in the land of Egypt, and the Lord thy God brought thee out of there, with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm." Why not use the same reasoning as before?

One explanation I found was to show Hashem's compassion towards us. Hashem instituted the Sabbath for the whole of humanity to benefit from and not just because Hashem himself rested on that day. Maimonides teaches. In truth both explanations are required in equal measure. There are many instances when the rationale behind fulfilling just one action is comparable with the old adage of 'Killing two birds with one stone' and it's no different here relating to why we are commanded to observe the Shabbat. Maimonides explains, "Hashem commanded us to abstain from work on the Sabbath, and to rest, for two purposes; namely, (1) that we might confirm the true theory of the Creation, which will clearly lead us to accept the existence of Hashem. And (2) That we have the opportunity to remember just like Mitzraim (Egypt), how kind Hashem has been in freeing us from the burden of our mundane weekly activities in which we are all engrossed in; enabling us to revitalise ourselves both physically and spiritually for the trials we would have to face in the upcoming week.

Just like the Shabbat, both renditions of the Ten Commandments are really a double blessing in disguise: it gives us correct notions, and also promotes and sustains the well-being of our bodies and soul.

