Ki Teitzei: Devarim (Deuteronomy)

What's it all about?

This week's parsha contains a whopping 74 of the Torah's 613 commandments. They include the laws of the beautiful captive; the laws governing the inheritance of the firstborn; the laws governing the wayward and rebellious son; instructions concerning the dignity of the dead, returning a lost object, sending away a mother bird before taking her chicks, the obligation to put up a fence around the roof of one's home, and the details of the forbidden plant and animal hybrids known as *kilayim*.



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The parsha also discusses penalties for adultery, rape or seduction of an unmarried girl, as well as the laws of marriage. The purity of the military camp is discussed as well, as is the obligation to pay workers on time and allow them the leisure to eat while working. Debts and divorce are discussed, too, as is *yibbum*, or the levirate marriage of a widow to her late husband's brother. The parsha concludes with the **obligation to remember the evils of Amalek.**

> "You must remember what the nation of Amalek did to you when you were traveling after you left Egypt— how, on the way, it attacked you by surprise, and mutilated all the weak ones at your rear. You were faint from thirst and weary, and they did not fear God."

Take a deeper dive

This week's parsha features an overwhelming torrent of mitzvot, or commandments: In fact, it contains a whopping 12 percent of all of the Torah's commandments, which can make reading it feel like zooming down a race track, barely catching a glimpse of one mitzvah before another comes careening by.

And that, argued Rabbi Judah Loew ben Bezalel, better known as the Maharal of Prague, was precisely the point.

The parsha, he explained, was packed thick with so many commandments to remind us of the exquisite life force each and every single one of us possesses. In life, he explained, we face many challenges pertaining to many areas of the human experience—at one point or another, we have to navigate our finances and our love life, our nutrition and our relationship with our parents and children, our care for the environment and our planning for the future. And having so much to think about and so much to do can seem overwhelming. Which is where this week's parsha comes in: By giving us so many mitzvot addressing so many disparate areas of life, the Torah reminds us that no matter how overwhelmed we may feel, we've got the ultimate booster in our pocket—**God loves us and trusts us enough to deal with everything that comes our way capably and gracefully.**

And He's here to help, too: The mitzvot, the Midrash reminds us, aren't just a collection of dry laws, another burden, God forbid, for us to carry. But, rather, they're a blueprint, the ultimate survival tool for a frequently chaotic world. Imagine, the rabbis of the Talmud told us in a charming parable, a person who was at sea and was thrown overboard. Before he could drown, the ship's captain rushes over and tosses him a thick, sturdy rope, saying, "Hold on to this rope and don't let go of it, because if you do, you will not survive." The rope, the rabbis explained, was a metaphor for the mitzvot—**as long as we follow God's plan, we'll overcome whatever life throws our way.**

Because the purpose of the mitzvot isn't to shape us into obedient, mindless creatures; on the contrary, **it's to help us discover the immense fortitude dormant within each one of us**, a life-affirming force we often don't even realize we possess.

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