

B'Chukotai



33rd sedra of 54;
last of 10 in Vayikra

Written on 131 lines, ranks 47th

5 parshiyot; 3 open, 2 closed

78 p'sukim, rank: 46 (7th in Vayikra)

1013 words, rank: 47 (7th in Vayikra)

3992 letters, rank: 47 (7th in Vayikra)

Small sedra; only 7 sedras are shorter

MITZVOT

12 mitzvot - 7 positive, 5 prohibitions

14 sedras have more; Va'etchanan also has 12; 38 sedras have fewer.



[P> X:Y (Z)] and [S> X:Y (Z)] indicate start of a parsha p'tucha or s'tuma. X:Y is Perek:Pasuk of the beginning of the parsha; (Z) is the number of p'sukim in the parsha.

The Book of VAYIKRA:

10 sedras, 36.6 columns, 1537 lines,
859 p'sukim, 11950 words, 44790 letters,
247 mitzvot (95 pos. & 152 prohibitions)
Smallest Chumash in number of sedras,
columns, lines, p'sukim, words, & letters.
Its sedras (avg) have the fewest verses,
words, and letters. OTOH, it has more
mitzvot than any other Book

Numbers in [square brackets] are the Mitzva-count of Sefer HaChinuch AND Rambam's Sefer HaMitzvot. A=ASEI (positive mitzva); L=LAV (prohibition). X:Y is the perek and pasuk from which the mitzva comes.

Kohen First Aliya 3 p'sukim 26:3-5

[P> 26:3 (11)] If we keep the Torah and mitzvot, then HaShem will provide beneficent, timely rainfall and bountiful crops. The yield of the Land will be so great, that each agricultural season will blend into the next one. And we will have plenty to eat on our own Land.

"If you walk on the path of My statutes..." Rashi comments that this is not just another way of saying "keep the mitzvot", but rather it points to our task of immersing ourselves in a Torah and Mitzvot way of life. Another commentator points to the word "walk" and says that it is insufficient to just "stand still" within an environment of mitzvot, one must take continual strides towards greater spiritual heights.

SDT And the tree of the field will give forth its fruit. Rashi says this refers to non-fruit-bearing trees that will bear fruit when G-d's full blessing will be given. One of the commentaries explains why Rashi departs from the simple meaning of the pasuk. Since if one says a Borei Pri HaAdama on a fruit, his bracha is valid, because fruits grow

on trees which grow from the ground, then regular fruit are included in the previous phrase "and the ground will give forth its yield". The phrase referring to trees is superfluous, which leads Rashi to his statement.

The Gemara says that IM B'CHUKOTAI TEILEICHU is more than just stating the facts: If this, then that; if not this, then something else. The Gemara says that HaShem is asking us, pleading with us, to keep the mitzvot and immerse ourselves in Torah. If He asks, how can we not do what He wants He created us, He put us into this world.

SDT The promises of prosperity from the opening p'sukim of the parsha are made for Jews who live in Eretz Yisrael. The same deal, apparently, does not apply to those who live in Chutz LaAretz. This, says Torat Kohanim, in analyzing the word B'ARTZ'CHEM. This is truly amazing and provides much food for thought. If you will follow My laws and mitzvot, says G-d, then you will be blessed with many good things **IFF** (if and only if - it's a real word; look it up) you live in Eretz Yisrael. If you live outside of Israel, G-d still expects compliance with Torah and Mitzvot, but does not promise prosperity and peace because of it.

IM B'CHUKOTAI TEILEICHU... If you will GO in My statutes... LALECHET, to go, implies movement, constant movement upward - no stagnation in serving G-d. - Chidushei HaRim

Levi Second Aliya 4 p'sukim 26:6-9

Further reward for (or results from) following the Torah and keeping mitzvot, will be peace and tranquility in the Land (of Israel). Both natural disasters (wild beasts) as well as human enemies (sword) will be kept at bay by HaShem. And when we do encounter our enemies, G-d will grant us the ability to vanquish them mightily. If we keep to our side of the deal (so to speak), we will be blessed with fertility and G-d will keep His covenant with us.

Notice how there is a promise of peace in the land and a promise for the might to vanquish the enemy. Peace in this context seems not to refer to our enemies; it means peace among Jews. Enemies from the outside might still exist, and we are promised the ability to defeat them.

The promises of blessings in this first part of the sedra come in two forms: not only agricultural and military, but natural and subtle on the one hand and open and obvious, on the other. Beneficial and timely rain much appreciated. Bumper crops much appreciated (one would hope). But rain and growth of produce is part of nature. On the other hand, the magnitude of promised military success is seemingly more miraculous. Yet (on the first hand), nature also consists of no rain and drought and failed crops.

So unparalleled agricultural success is truly miraculous as well.

Sh'lishi Third Aliya 37 p'sukim 26:10-46

The longest Sh'lishi of any sedra

This Aliya begins with the last four p'sukim of the "good" part - the promises for our proper Torah behavior. G-d will be with us; He is the One Who took us out of Egypt, broke the yoke of our oppression, and led us out with heads held high.

[P> 26:14 (13)] But then we get to the "Tochacha", one of two portions of the Torah (there are actually several others, but these are the big two) containing G-d's detailed admonition to the People, warning of the dire consequences that will result from disregard of Torah and mitzvot. Because it is so painful to hear these terrible words, especially realizing how often they have come true, the custom developed to read this portion in a low voice. We are ashamed that G-d needs to threaten us in so graphic a way. Today the minhag is to call the Rabbi, Gabbai, or the Baal Korei himself for this portion. (In many congregations, it is the gabbai who gives out the Aliyot who gets the Tochacha, so that no one else can feel slighted by him.) The Tochacha is always contained within one Aliya which begins and ends on "cheerier" notes. This is the reason for the widely disparate distribution of p'sukim among the Aliyot of this sedra. (Almost half of which are in this one Aliya.)

On the other hand, there are those who frown on the custom of lowering the voice, because we are supposed to love reproach, since it helps us straighten ourselves out. On the other hand, most follow the custom to read the Tochacha in a lower voice. Torah readers should be careful though, not to read too low to be heard properly, and not too fast to be properly heard.

A significant theme of the Tochacha is the connection between the keeping of the laws of Sh'mita and our hold on the Land. We must always realize that we do not keep Eretz Yisrael without any strings attached. We have a clear commitment and responsibility to keep the Torah and fulfill the mitzvot as individuals AND as a community. Sh'mita was commanded in the previous sedra. In this week's sedra, we are presented with the dire consequences of the disregard of this important mitzva.

[S> 26:27 (20)] Continual reference is made of both physical and spiritual benefits from observance of mitzvot, and the opposite, for disregard of the mitzvot. This combination of promise of good and threat of bad, together with the body of mitzvot of the Torah, constitutes the covenant between G-d and the People of Israel at Sinai via Moshe.

SDT Yaakov is spelled with a VAV 5 times in Tanach (Once in this week's sedra and four times in Yirmiyahu). Rashi points out that the name of Eliyahu is missing a VAV five times. It is

as if Yaakov takes collateral from Eliyahu to guarantee that he will eventually come to announce the coming of the Moshiach.

V'ZACHARTI ET B'RITI YAAKOV V'AF ET B'RITI YITZCHAK V'AF ET B'RITI AVRAHAM EZKOR V'HA-ARTZ EZKOR: (Vayikra 26:42)

G-d will remember the covenant with Yaakov and the one with Yitzchak and the one with Avraham... Midrash Rabba says that the words ET with each of the AVOT come to include the IMAHOT. If so, asks the ADMOR of GUR zt"l, where is the fourth mother? He answers that the fourth one is Rachel, and the Torah has already told us of G-d's remembering her, as it says: VAYIZKOR ELOKIM ET RACHEL... (B'reishit 30:22)

R'YMP z"l pointed out several distinctions between the two Tochachot in the Torah. The first Tochacha is part of the Sinai covenant and therefore is contained in B'chukotai, which is read shortly before Shavuot. The second Tochacha is in Ki Tavo because it is part of the Arvot Mo'av experience. He also points out that the first Tochacha ends with a promise of redemption THAT IS PART OF the Tochacha. The second one does not. Only in the following sedra do you have the promise of Geula. The first is orderly if you don't listen, then such and such will happen. And if you still don't, then worse. And if... then even worse. The second Tochacha is a series of threats and punishments, one after the other. The first Tochacha relates to the destruction of the first Beit HaMikdash and the exile that

followed it; the second to that of the second Beit HaMikdash. The first Tochacha came from G-d via Moshe; the second, from Moshe.

R'vi'i Fourth Aliya 15 p'sukim 27:1-15

[P> 27:1 (8)] In pledging funds to the Mikdash, it is possible to offer the "value" of an individual [350, A114 27:2]. The Torah lists amounts for individuals depending on sex and age. In the event that the donor is poor, a kohen may reduce the amount.

[S> 27:9 (26)] If a person pledges an animal to the Mikdash which qualifies as a korban, he may not exchange or redeem that animal (even for one of greater value) [351, L106 27:10]. If he attempts to do so, then both the original animal and its attempted substitute (t'mura) are consecrated to the Mikdash [352, A87 27:10]. An animal not fit for the Altar is to be evaluated by a kohen [353, A115 27:11], and can be redeemed by adding 1/5 of its valuation.

Actually, 1/4 of the amount is added, so that the amount added becomes 1/5 of the total amount paid. E.g. An animal was valued at 100 shekel. 1/4 of that is 25. Add that to the first amount, and the person must pay 125. The 25 which he added is 1/5 of the 125. This is how CHOMESH works in all situations that call for it.

Let x be the CHOMESH such that

$$x = 1/5 (1+x)$$

$$5x = 1 + x$$

$$4x = 1$$

$$x = 1/4$$

A person can also offer the value of a house [354, A116 27:14], in which case a kohen (expert in matters of real estate) determines its value, and the house is redeemable by adding 1/5.

Ponder this... If donating the value of a male child between 5 and 20 years of age, for example, is equivalent to a pledge of 20 shekel, then why not just donate 20 shekel? What is the significance of labeling certain amounts as the "value" of a person?

Part of the answer seems quite obvious. We psychologically relate much more strongly to our giving the value of person to the Beit HaMikdash than we would to a mere sum of money. This would be especially so if the person were ourselves or a loved one. Modern fundraising psychology borrows this idea. Compare the emotional connection of contributing, let's say, \$100 to a charitable cause, compared with the same \$100 which is called "foster a child" or "feed a family" for a certain period of time. The money is the same. But the emotional response is quite different.

MitzvaWatch

Notice the unusual, almost unique nature of T'MURA (the attempted exchange of an animal for another sacred animal). Generally, when the

Torah prohibits something, an individual is considered to violate that prohibition when he does that which was forbidden. One may not cook meat with milk. Doing so is a violation. One may not steal. Stealing is a violation. Etc. Etc. One may not exchange one animal for a consecrated one (that is fit for the Altar). But one cannot do so. The attempted exchange fails. The sacred animal is still sacred. So in this instance, that which is forbidden is not accomplished. It cannot be done. The attempt itself then is the violation. This is highly unusual. In addition to the attempted exchange failing, it also carries the additional penalty of the new animal also becoming sacred. And T'mura can be punishable by MAKOT (whipping), which makes it more unusual, since no act was done. A prohibition that involved no act is rarely punishable by human courts. Nor is a violation with a penalty additionally punished by MAKOT.

Chamishi 5th Aliya 6 p'sukim 27:16-21

If a person dedicates the value of his property to the Mikdash, it is to be evaluated by a kohen based on quality and number of years to the next Yovel [355, A117 27:16]. It then becomes redeemable by adding a fifth. If a person did not redeem the land, then Yovel does not release it to him, but rather to the Mikdash as consecrated property.

The same applies if the officials at the

Mikdash sold the property before redemption. At Yovel, it reverts to the Mikdash.

Shishi Sixth Aliya 7 p'sukim 27:22-28

If the property in question is not hereditary, but rather purchased, then the rules differ. The land is evaluated in the same way, but at Yovel it reverts to its original owners, and not to the Mikdash.

A firstling (if it is male) is automatically sanctified to the Altar; one may not consecrate it as another korban [356, L107 27:26], because it is already Kodesh. This rule of not switching one sanctity for another, applies to other categories of korban as well.

A non-kosher animal offered to the Mikdash is sold off.

If something itself is consecrated to the Mikdash (rather than its value), it cannot be redeemed; it remains holy.

Sh'VII Seventh Aliya 6 p'sukim 27:29-34

Consecrated property goes to the kohanim [357, 358, 359; A145, L110, L111 27:29]. A person under a death penalty has the status of "Cherem" (non-redeemable items). The land's tithe (here referring to Maaser Sheni), is sacred; it is (either to be eaten in Jerusalem or) to be redeemed.

The tithe of the animals (cows, goats, sheep) are to be separated by counting every tenth one regardless of the quality of the animal [360, A78 27:32]. These animals are sacred and must be brought to the Beit HaMikdash as a korban Maaseir, within the animal's first year of life. Its meat may only be eaten in Jerusalem, under conditions of ritual purity, and for a limited time (two days and the night between them). Maaser B'heima may not be redeemed [361, L109 27:33]. Violation of this rule results in both animals being considered holy.

More about Maaseir B'heima

Two (at least) significant differences between Maaseir of produce and that of animals:

With produce, you gather your yield and take a tenth, preferably from the best of the crop. With animals, you set the newborns up so they will pass through a narrow opening in their enclosure one by one; you count and declare the 10th one to be Maaseir. You do not choose which animal is Maaseir. Whichever one "passes under your staff" tenth, that's the one. (So too for 20th, 30th, etc.) It could be the potential blue ribbon winner at the county fair or it could be a scrawny, sickly animal.

With produce, if T'rumot and Maas'rot are not taken from the gathered produce, the entire amount is Tevel and forbidden to eat. All tithing must be done before the rest is considered

appropriately prepared.

With animals, if a person has 10 newborn lambs, let's say, and he doesn't perform the mitzva of Maaseir B'heima, then he failed to do a mitzva, but the 10 lambs are all "kosher" and acceptable. Maaseir B'heima is almost like a voluntary mitzva.

And unlike B'CHOR (mentioned earlier), which becomes sacred the moment it is born - whether or not the owner proclaims it KADOSH (which he is supposed to do) - it is, in all cases, KADOSH. Not so with Maaseir B'heima. The animal is not sacred unless the owner follows proper procedure and declares the animal holy.

29 newborns only 2 will be Maaseir.

"These are the mitzvot... at Sinai." This final pasuk of the sedra (and book of Vayikra), closes the section that was opened by the first pasuk of B'har, the usual partner sedra to B'chukotai.

CHAZAK, CHAZAK...

It is customary for the congregation to stand for the concluding pasuk of each book of the Torah. This seems NOT to raise the strong objections that standing for the Aseret HaDibrot does. The Torah-reader reads the final words with a dramatic flair, signalling the congregation to respond with "Chazak, chazak, v'nitchazeik" (Strong, strong, and let us be strengthened).

The reader then repeats that phrase. Some say that the person who receives the Aliya should NOT say the phrase, as

this might constitute an interruption between the Torah reading and his concluding bracha. Or possibly a different reason - that the congregation is saying Chazak... to him.

It is considered a special honor to receive this Book-completing Aliya.

Maftir is the last three p'sukim.

Haftara 17 p'sukim Yirmiyahu 16:19-17:14

The words of the prophet contain warnings and admonitions which echo the Tochacha contained in the sedra. The haftara ends with a prayer for G-d's help in keeping us faithful to Him and His Torah.

Rabbi Jacobs z"l mentions that this haftara is probably more matched to the other Tochacha sedra, Ki Tavo, but Ki Tavo needs one of the 7 Consolation haftarot, so this one went with B'chukotai.

PROBING the PROPHETS

In the midst of the prophet Yirmiyahu's severe condemnation of Israel, after excoriating the nation for their repeated sins and warning them of the defeat and tragedy they would soon suffer, the navi shifts his focus and, almost as if in a sudden, semi-conscious trance, he begins to speak of a glorious future that awaits the people of Israel. This sudden change of focus is addressed by a number of parshanim (commentators)

who attempt to explain why there is such a radical shift in the tone and the message of Yirmiyahu.

The Malbim sees the words of the prophet as being addressed to Hashem in an attempt to forestall or even prevent the foretold punishment. Yirmiyahu cries out that G-d in the ultimate strength and refuge, a truth that His people acknowledge. Their wayward acts of idolatry should not anger Hashem, for idol worship is useless and the "gods" they worship are only false. Deep down, the navi argues, the people know full well that G-d is their strength and their savior.

The Abarbanel points to the verse that precedes the opening words of our haftara in which G-d pledges to remove all of the pagan worship that had defiled the land. The Abarbanel explains that once the prophet spoke of the ultimate punishment, of the cleansing of the land, an act that would be completed in the Messianic era, he continues by describing how all the nations will reject their false worship in the future, and will recognize Hashem as the true G-d.

Most interesting are the comments of Rav Dovid Feinstein, shlit"a, who declares that the nations abandonment of idolatry and their embrace of Hashem, their realization that "ach sheker nachalu avoteinu," our ancestors inherited only falsehood, will come at the time in the future when they see how the Jewish nation, having remained faithful to the service of their G-d throughout the centuries - despite the persecutions and the pogroms - have succeeded and

flourished in so many endeavors, that it could only be an blessing of G-d, to Whom they remained faithful.

Rarely does a day pass without our reading of a scientific discovery or medical breakthrough or archeological find made here in Eretz HaKodesh. We all glow with pride over the achievements made in Israel. But what we often fail to realize is that each achievement is an act of Kiddush Hashem. Every advance or technological "miracle" developed by an ancient nation who has returned to the land they yearned for over thousands of years, glorifies, sanctifies and elevates the name of HaKadosh Baruch Hu. And it brings people closer to belief in the true G-d.

We have within our ability to sanctify Hashem and bring the world closer to His service. Shouldn't we try to do so every day?

Probing the Prophets, weekly insights into the Haftara, is written by Rabbi Nachman (Neil) Winkler, author of Bringing the Prophets to Life (Gefen Publ.)