

Va'etchanan

Shabbat Nachamu

45th of 54 sedras; 2nd of 11 in D'varim

Written on 249 lines in a Torah, rank: 7

21 parshiyot; 5 open, 16 closed,
7th (tied with Ki Tavo)

122 p'sukim - rank: 17 (2nd in D'varim)
same as Vayak'hel & Ki Tavo - but larger

1878 words; rank: 10th (2nd in D'varim)

7343 letters; rank: 10th (2nd in D'varim)

Va'etchanan's p'sukim are longer than average, hence the jump in rank from 17th for p'sukim to 10th for words

MITZVOT

12 of 613 mitzvot: 8 pos., 4 prohibitions and many more that are counted elsewhere - this is so for several sedras, but it really shows for Va'etchanan (e.g. Aseret HaDibrot in Yitro has 14 mitzvot, repeated here but not counted here)



[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 Parsha's beginning; (Z) is the number of p'sukim in the parsha.

Numbers in [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

11 p'sukim - 3:23-4:4

[S> 3:23 (7)] Moshe Rabeinu continues his farewell words to the People. He tells them that he had asked G-d to rescind His decree banning Moshe from entry into the Land of Israel.

SDT The Baal Shem Tov commented that Moshe, who had learned the entire Torah, Written Word and Oral Law, from G-d Himself, used the term "You have begun to show me Your greatness..." The more one learns Torah, the more one learns about G-d, the more one will realize that he has just begun to understand Who G-d is.

G-d refused this request and forbade Moshe to ask again. Moshe ascended a mountain from where he saw the Land. G-d then told him to transfer the leadership to Yehoshua.

[P> 4:1 (24)] He (Moshe) proceeds to review the laws and statutes (Torah and mitzvot) by which the people are now to live... in Eretz Yisrael.

Neither should the Torah be added to nor detracted from.

[These mitzvot are counted in R'ei. Strange that they are counted the second time they occur and not the first, which would be expected].

Another warning against idolatry follows. Then, "And you who cling to G-d are all alive today". (This is one of many allusions to T'CHIYAT HAMEITIM in the Torah.)

MitzvaWatch

The twin prohibitions of neither adding nor subtracting from the Torah, are mentioned in Va'etchanan and again in R'ei (where they are counted among the 613). The Vilna Gaon points out that the plural form is used one time and the singular form is used in the other case. This, he says, alludes to two different aspects of these prohibitions. It is forbidden to add to or subtract from a particular mitzva - for example, one may not take 5 species or 3 species on Sukkot for the fulfillment of the mitzva of "Lulav & Etrog". (If you add something to the Arbaa Minim to beautify then - it's not done - it would not be BAL TOSIF.) Nor may one add or subtract to the total of the mitzvot. To treat a Rabbinic mitzva as a Torah law, or vice versa, would be an example of the other aspect of these prohibitions.

The spirit of these prohibitions (if not the actual definitions) would include treating (or teaching) a CHUMRA as if it were required, or vice versa (claiming that something that is prohibited is "only" a chumra or custom, when it is a halacha). Aside from people who intentionally do this, it is more common to find people doing it one way or the other inadvertently, either because of ignorance or because of a sincere (but slightly misguided) desire to enhance the observance of mitzvot. This is especially important for parents and

teachers of young children. Don't say ASUR if you mean, strictly speaking it isn't actually forbidden, but it is considered a proper thing to abstain from doing such and such. It sounds more complicated, but it is more "honest" and therefore it is the more proper way to transmit Torah to your children and students. (Obviously, when a child is very young, you have to simplify matters. But don't forget to upgrade the child's level of understanding as he or she grows older.)

Levi - Second Aliya 36 p'sukim - 4:5-40

Once again, Moshe emphasizes that mitzvot are meant to be kept in Eretz Yisrael. (This not only applies to Land-related mitzvot, but to the entire range of mitzvot.)

There is repeated reference in the book of D'varim, and especially in Parshat Va'etchanan, to Eretz Yisrael being THE reason for our having been taken out of Egypt, formed into a Nation, and given the Torah and mitzvot.

Prolonged exile has taught us that the Torah can be kept, must be kept, no matter where a Jew finds himself. This was one of the reasons that the Torah was given at Sinai, prior to entry into the Land. On the other hand, one should not lose sight of the fact, repeated often by Moshe Rabeinu in D'varim, that G-d has always intended us to observe His mitzvot IN THE LAND OF ISRAEL.

Are there more mitzvot to keep in Israel than outside? YES. But maybe more significantly, every mitzva - even those that are performed all over the world, can reach their full potential ONLY in Israel. This is a message that each of us has to realize, understand, and internalize. Then we must spread this message to family and friends abroad who feel that they "have everything we need to be fully Jewish" in their respective religious communities around the world. AND the vital significance of Torah AND Israel to our lives as Jews must be taught to those less committed Jews here in Israel and abroad.

On the other hand, we must not forget that Israel today is not the realization of The Dream, but rather a step on the road to the Complete Redemption, the restoration of Zion and Jerusalem, the rebuilding of the Beit HaMikdash, and the coming of Mashiach. This idea helps us refocus after the mourning period that ends with the 10th of Av, and is an appropriate theme to usher in the periods of consolation and T'shuva.

We must be careful to preserve and perform the mitzvot because (among other reasons) it is the mitzvot that project Judaism as an intelligent religion to the nations of the world. This in turn, sanctifies G-d's Name. We must be extremely careful to remember and transmit to our children, the "Sinai Experience".

Moshe Rabeinu describes for the new

generation the details of Matan Torah. He includes a specific warning against the potentially idolatrous thoughts caused by the combination of the magnificent, tangible universe in which we live, and the invisible, intangible G-d.

A primary cause of idolatry is the natural human tendency to relate better to the concrete, visible, tangible rather than something abstract and intangible. The Sun is in the sky. It's hot, full of energy, gives us light, and sustains life as we know it. People found Sun-worship easier to accept than the worship of He Who created the Sun and everything else, but cannot be seen. True worship of the One G-d was what Avraham and Sara taught many people. And, as OR LAGOYIM, a light unto the nations, it is what we are supposed to teach and show the world.

G-d had taken us out of Egypt in order to make us His Nation. He got angry at me, says Moshe, and forbade me to enter the Land. Again, Moshe warns the People against abandoning the covenant with G-d after his (Moshe's) passing.

[P> 4:25 (16)] The next portion is read on Tish'a b'Av morning (in addition to Shabbat Nachamu)... In spite of the many warnings against idolatry, Moshe prophesies (predicts) that there will come a time when the People will turn from G-d and be exiled from their Land. It will then come to pass that the People will seek out G-d and return to

Him. Moshe emphasizes the uniqueness of the People of Israel and their special relationship with G-d and beseeches the People to remain faithful to Torah and mitzvot. One can hear a pleading in his voice, as if he is begging the people not to go in the direction of his prophecy.

This theme is oft-repeated in the Torah. Do what G-d asks of you. Don't turn away from Him. If you remain faithful to Him, wonderful things will happen to and for you. If you turn away from Him, terrible things will happen. You will turn away from Him; terrible things will happen; and then you will turn back to Him... We have the ability to skip the bad stuff - LET'S.

Shlishi - Third Aliya **9 p'sukim - 4:41-49**

[P> 4:41 (9)] Although the cities of refuge will not function as such until conquest and settlement of Eretz Yisrael, Moshe (with enthusiasm to do G-d's bidding, even though he knows what's coming soon thereafter) designates the 3 cities on the East Bank of the Jordan - Betzer in the Mishor Wilderness area for Reuven, Ramot in the Gil'ad area for Gad, and Golan in the Bashan area for Menashe.

These (the mitzvot about to be presented) were taught by Moshe to the People following the Exodus in the lands on the East Bank of the Jordan.

(Note the detail in the description of the

location of the people, the repetition of their successes in conquering the "east bank" lands. It seems meant to be encouraging to the people for what lies ahead.)

V'zot HaTorah... said when the Torah is lifted, comes from D'varim 4:44. In the Siddur, the words AL PI HASHEM B'YAD MOSHE are added. That phrase appears four times in Bamidbar, but 9:23 seems to be the one from which it is taken. (Some say V'zot HaTorah without the added words in order not to recite partial p'sukim. And some say the whole pasuk 9:23, which ends with AL PI HASHEM B'YAD MOSHE.

R'VI'I - Fourth Aliya **18 p'sukim - 5:1-18**

[P> 5:1 (5)] Moshe begins the review of mitzvot with a restatement of the Aseret HaDibrot. He emphasizes that the Covenant at Sinai was not just between G-d and the previous generation, but between G-d and all generations of Jews to come.

MitzvaWatch

The most well-known difference between the two presentations of the Aseret HaDibrot is the "Shamor v'Zachor" of Shabbat. Generally, "Zachor" is interpreted as referring to the positive mitzvot and aspects of Shabbat, whereas "Shamor" is a command to preserve Shabbat by not violating the prohibitions. The tradi-

tional minimum of two candles for Shabbat (although one candle satisfies the halacha), are said to represent these two facets of Shabbat. It is this intertwined nature of the positive aspects of Shabbat and its prohibitions that is "responsible" for Kiddush on Friday night being obligatory upon women. Rather than treat Kiddush as a pure "time-related positive mitzva" which would (probably) mean that women would be exempt (as they are from the mitzva of Sukka, for example), we view Kiddush as part of the whole Shabbat package, which means full and equal obligation for men and women. The two sides of Shabbat were commanded B'DIBUR ECHAD and are inseparable.

On a hashkafa level, we can see the prohibitions of Shabbat as more than a restrictive list of DON'Ts. Abstention from Melacha can be seen as Dayan Grunfeld z"l puts it in The Sabbath -- as laying G-d's gifts of creative activity to us at His feet (so to speak) in homage to the Creator and Master of All. This, on a weekly basis, so that we will not take these gifts for granted nor assume that our abilities and talents are self-produced. There is a subtle difference between not doing Melacha and abstaining from Melacha. If we understand and appreciate the distinction, our Shabbat observance and enjoyment can be greatly enhanced. Shabbat is more than just "don't do this; don't do that!"

MitzvaWatch

The Aseret HaDibrot in Yitro contains 14 of the 613 mitzvot. (The 2nd commandment has four prohibitions related to idolatry, the 4th has two mitzvot related to Shabbat, and one each from the other 8.) The first 9 commandments in Va'etchanan contain the same 13 mitzvot as their counterparts in Yitro. Those mitzvot are counted from Yitro. The 10th is worded differently here and is counted separately (in addition to "Thou shalt not covet") as the prohibition of "lust and unhealthy desire" [416, L266 5:18]. Although the first part of the tenth commandment uses the term V'LO TACHMOD (covet), the second part introduces a new term which deals exclusively with thoughts and feelings; its counterpart in Yitro involves acting on those feelings. V'LO TIT'AVEH in a way, completes a set of prohibitions, that starts with obviously sinful acts - murder, stealing, etc. to a feeling in the heart (LO TACHMOD) which can, and often does, lead to acts which are "milder", but nonetheless "problematic". For example, if a person is jealous of a friend's cellphone - the iPhone 20+, and comments about it often enough, the friend might just feel uncomfortable enough to give it to the jealous friend. Nothing wrong, per se, in complimenting someone's phone, but in this case it is part of the prohibition of LO TACHMOD. And V'LO TIT'AVEH is the

feelings even without anything else happening as a result of the envy.

The Aseret HaDibrot lay out in the following manner:

[S>5:6 (5)] Anochi and Lo Yih-yeh, which we consider the first two “dibrot” are contained within a single parsha s’tuma. [S>5:11 (1)] The prohibition against taking G-d’s name in vain (vain oaths) is its own parsha s’tuma. [S> 5:12 (4)] The Shabbat commandment is its own parsha s’tuma. Shabbat’s commandment is a P’tucha in Yitro. [S> 5:16 (1)] Honoring parents is a s’tuma. [S> 5:17 (¼)] Do not murder, [S> 5:17 (¼)] And do not commit adultery, [S> 5:17 (¼)] And do not steal (kidnap), [S> 5:17 (¼)] And do not bear false witness. These four dibrot are each a separate parsha s’tuma, all in the same pasuk! [S> 5:18 (½)] And do not covet another man’s wife and [S>5:18 (½)] and do not lust after anything that another person possesses are each a s’tuma, from the same pasuk, and counting as a single (the 10th) dibra (or dibur) [416, L266 5:18].

Chamishi - 5th Aliya **15 p'sukim - 5:19-6:3**

[S> 5:19 (15)] Moshe next reminds the People that those who were present at Matan Torah were afraid to continue hearing G-d’s Voice and agreed to listen to the words of a true prophet speaking in G-d’s Name in lieu of direct communication. (Actually, take

a look at the pasuk right before the Aseret HaDibrot and you’ll see that Moshe Rabeinu was saying the same thing “right up front”.)

This episode is crucial to our understanding of the Chain of Tradition and the method of transmission of the Oral Law. It made not only Moshe Rabeinu vital to our hearing and understanding of G-d's Word, but so too the Moshe Rabeinus of every generation. This is so for prophets, during the period of prophecy, and by the Sages throughout the generations.

Moshe emphasizes that G-d agreed to the People’s request.

And yet again, Moshe links observance of mitzvot with the only proper environment for Jewish life - Eretz Yisrael. (This idea is actually expressed in THREE different ways in the final p’sukim of this Aliya.)

Shishi - Sixth Aliya **22 p'sukim - 6:4-25**

[P> 6:4 (6)] The first portion of this Aliya is the first parsha of SH’MA. “...HaShem is One.” This statement of Jewish faith is also considered the mitzva to believe in the unity and uniqueness of G-d [417, A2 6:4].

Note that G-d's unity is also part of the mitzva to believe in Him [25, A1 Sh'mot 20:2], but warrants its own mitzva to emphasize this essential element of belief, in contrast to many other religions.

"Love" G-d with your entire being [418, A3 6:5]. (Many mitzvot, Jewish practices and the attitude with which we do mitzvot are all considered manifestations of Love of G-d.) We must study and teach Torah [419, A11 6:7] (for practical purposes AND purely for the sake of learning). We are to recite the Sh'ma twice daily [420, A10 6:7], wear T'filin on the arm [421, A13 6:8] and front-center on the head [422, A12 6:8], and put a Mezuzah on our doorposts [423, A15 6:9].

SDT The mitzva of learning and teaching Torah can be fulfilled with one's head, one's intellect. Tell someone a Dvar Torah and you both have fulfilled V'SHINANTAM L'VA- NECHA. But, tell that same Dvar Torah in an animated way that shows love of Torah and that ignites the emotion of the listener, so that he not only adds to his knowledge of Torah, but his excitement and enthusiasm for Torah and Mitzvot has increased, then you have fulfilled an additional mitzva, V'AHAVTA ET HASHEM ELOKECHA, to love G-d with all your heart (based on Sefer HaChareidim).

We can generalize this aspect of AHAVAT HASHEM to include all mitzvot. Shabbat, for example. Someone can go through all the motions and not violate the Shabbat; but do it with love and that fulfills V'AHAVTA, in addition to Shabbat.

[S> 6:10 (6)] Now, another warning.

You'll go into Eretz Yisrael, have big homes filled with all good things, that you did not work for... Still remember that G-d took you out of Egypt... don't turn away from Him...

It is said that a wealthy person has a harder time with faith in G-d than a poor person. A poor person tends to turn to G-d, to complain, but also to express his faith that his lot will improve. The wealthy tend to pat themselves on the back and take credit for that which he should be thanking G-d. Generalizations, of course, but something to think about, nonetheless.

[S> 6:16 (40)] Do not test G-d... (as you did repeatedly in the Midbar). Understood as the prohibition of overly challenging a true prophet and demanding signs from him (beyond what is reasonable to determine his claim as a true prophet) [424, L64 6:16]. Keep the mitzvot... be straight with G-d... so that things will be good for you in Eretz Yisrael... (there it is again!)

[S> 6:20 (6)] When your child will ask you tomorrow... tell him "we were slaves to Par'o in Egypt and G-d took us out... and He commanded us... and it will do us good to listen..."

Sh'VII Seventh Aliya 11 p'sukim - 7:1-11

[S>7:1 (11)] Finally, Moshe tells the People that the nations in Eretz Yisrael whom we will encounter are mightier than Israel. But G-d will give them over

into Israel's hands. We are required to destroy the "Seven Nations" [425, A187 7:2], not to show mercy to idolaters in the Land [426, L50 7:2], and certainly not to intermarry with them [427, L52 7:3] or any other non-Jews.

Regardless of how secure one is in one's belief, intermarriage and other close contact with other cultures will have an adverse effect upon the Jew and on the Jewish People. In addition to the Torah-prohibition of intermarriage, there are many Rabbinic prohibitions geared to restrict social contact with non-Jews.

We must destroy the idolatry in the Land. We must always keep in mind the basis upon which G-d has built His relationship with us.

It is because of G-d's love for us and His promises to our ancestors that He has taken us out of Egypt.

Know that G-d is trustworthy to keep His promises and reward those who properly follow His ways, as well as punish those who do not. The sedra ends with a 'command' to keep the Torah.

The final 3 p'sukim of the sedra are reread for the Maftir.

Haftara 26 p'sukim **Yeshayahu 40:1-26**

First of the 7 Haftarot of Consolation, (all of which come from Yeshayahu). Yeshayahu as a prophet of destruction and Divine punishment for faithlessness, can be seen in ch.1 which was the haftara last Shabbat, and in subsequent chapters through 39. With our haftara this week, ch. 40, we see another side of the prophet. G-d commands the prophets (through Yeshayahu) to bring the message of comfort and the end of Babylonian captivity. How appropriate a choice for the post-9Av haftara.