

NITZAVIM

51st of the 54 sedras;
8th of the 11 in D'varim



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

4 Parshiyot; 1 open, 3 closed

40 p'sukim - ranks 53 (10th in D'varim)

657 words - ranks 51 (8th in D'varim)

2575 letters - ranks 51 (8th in D'varim)

Only Vayeilech has fewer p'sukim than Nitzavim, but in words and letters, Nitzavim also beats out Haazinu and V'zot HaB'racha. Ironically, Nitzavim's p'sukim are longer than those of any sedra in the Torah except for Vayeilech. In lines in a Sefer Torah, Haazinu has more than Nitzavim because of the extra blank space in the special way Haazinu is written.

MITZVOT

None of the Taryag are in Nitzavim
But what about T'SHUVA? See further

Aliya-by-Aliya Sedra Summary

[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.

Nitzavim & Vayeilech are read separately when RH is MON-TUE or TUE-WED. They are combined when RH is THU-FRI or Shabbat-SUN.

Kohen - First Aliya 3 p'sukim - 29:9-11

[P>29:11] Having so recently heard the frightful Tochacha and the curses that are invoked against those who betray G-d, Israel is understandably nervous about its future. Nitzavim therefore, begins on the positive, reassuring note that we are ALL standing before G-d and entering again into a covenant with Him. These opening p'sukim call our attention to the "inclusiveness" of the People of Israel. We are made up of scholars and leaders, judges and functionaries, men, women, and children, converts, wood cutters and water gatherers (Ashkenazim and S'faradim, religious and secular, Mitnagdim and Chasidim, baseball Giants fans (or Red Sox fans) and fans of lesser teams...). But together they all stood to reaffirm their commitment to G-d. Jewish Unity has always been our strength; its lack, our greatest weakness.

SOT: Rav Aharon of Karlin pointed out that ATEM is made of the letters of the word EMET, truth. This, he said, is the only way to achieve LIFNEI HASHEM, to stand before G-d - in truth.

SOT: The Alshich points out that the Torah describes the People as "all of you, before G-d", and then proceeds to delineate different types of Jews. Before G-d, we ARE all the same. Whatever differences might exist pale into insignificance in comparison with

the fact that we are all created B'TZELEM ELOKIM, in the Divine Image. Differences might be important from our perspective. We view some people as more valuable than others. But we really have no way to know how G-d views us. In His eyes we are all standing erect this day...

Levi - Second Aliya 3 p'sukim - 29:12-14

And there is more. The second three-pasuk set proclaims that it is not just the entire People of Israel who were alive at the time, who are making this covenant with G-d, it is also our ancestors to whom G-d made His special promises, and to the generations of Jews in the past AND the future, whose spirit (souls) were present at this covenant.

Perhaps this is the meaning of the prophecy to Avraham Avinu that his descendants will be as countless as the stars of the heavens. Take the millions of Jews alive today, add the millions who have preceded us, add the - how many more? - future generations, and we can truly be called "without number". Nations that have come to an end, can be numbered. An eternal people cannot ever be counted.

Shlishi - Third Aliya 14 p'sukim - 29:15-28

As he has done several times before,

Moshe Rabeinu presents both sides of the covenant with G-d before the People: You have been in Egypt and you are aware of their abominable practices and those of the other nations which you have encountered. Perhaps there is a rebellious individual among you who will turn from G-d and embrace another faith.

SDT: The phrase describing what we would today refer to as a "rotten apple" is SHORESH POREH ROSH V'LAANA, literally a poisonous root of gall and wormwood. The initial letters of this phrase rearrange to spell SHOFAR, the antidote to this negative facet of Jewish life. The Shofar must awaken the one who stray and start him on the road of T'shuva.

A person who turns to another religion will be severely punished, even if he thinks otherwise. These p'sukim are a miniature version of the Tochacha from last week's reading.

The portion concludes with the statement that there are mysteries of this world that are G-d's and there are revealed truths that belong to us and our children. Our challenge is to remain faithful to the Torah.

This pasuk has wide applications. In all areas of human knowledge - science, math, history... - there are mysteries and there are revealed truths. But remember, today's mysteries can be revealed tomorrow, next year... or never. As much as the pasuk reminds of how

much we don't know - it comforts us with the idea that our finite minds don't have to know everything. We try our best to understand, and that's enough.

R'vi'i - Fourth Aliya 6 p'sukim - 30:1-6

[S>30:1 (10)] From the perspective of absolute justice, if we break the terms of our agreement with G-d, punishment should be swift and complete. But we could not survive such an existence. This portion of Nitzavim tells us that if (when) we break the covenant and are dispersed among the nations of the world as punishment, all hope is not lost. We have the golden opportunity to return to G-d - and He will help the process along. This too becomes part of the agreement with G-d. The concepts of return in a physical and spiritual sense are intermingled in this Torah portion.

The wayward Jew turning back towards HaShem and the Torah, and the Jew exiled to a distant land coming back to Eretz Yisrael are presented simultaneously. This represents the dual nature of T'shuva. What a wonderful opportunity beckons each Jew - and the Jewish People as a whole - in being given a second chance to live a true Torah life.

MITZVAnotes

Rambam and Sefer HaChinuch (and others?) do not count T'SHUVA per se

among the 613 mitzvot. Sefer HaChareidim, the SMa"K, and others do count T'SHUVA as one of TARYAG.

One can say that Rambam counts only specific, distinct mitzvot. A command which is all-inclusive, such as "Keep My mitzvot", "Be holy", "Be straightforward with G-d", are not numbered as part of the 613 on their own, because they are really part of all other mitzvot. T'shuva can be viewed like that. Part of the mitzva to Recite the Sh'ma is that if one does not, or does it without kavana, then he must repent his ways and say the Sh'ma correctly. Part of the prohibition against eating non-kosher is that if one does, then he must repent. More than T'shuva being its own mitzva, it is an add-on to and part of all the others.

This is one way of looking at T'shuva, specifically in explanation for its not being numbered among the 613 by Rambam. Let's call it a supra-mitzva (and a super-mitzva).

Here's another way of looking at why Rambam did not count T'shuva as a mitzva. Remember - he and everyone else consider T'shuva to be a mitzva; the question here is whether it gets numbered among the 613 or does it have a different, higher status.

We can look at T'shuva as a gift from G-d. He doesn't HAVE to command it. He just has to let it be possible. And we should jump at the opportunity. The Torah does not have to command us to breathe. We do it because it is helpful to

living. So is T'shuva. The Torah doesn't have to tell us to repent, just how to do it.

On that note, there is one aspect of T'shuva that IS counted by Rambam as a mitzva among the 613 - Vidui, verbal confession. This is a specific aspect of T'shuva that DOES "qualify" for the Rambam's count (which he counts from Parshat Naso). And yet, as mentioned earlier, some mitzva-counters DO count T'shuva per se among the 613.

Rambam's Hilchot T'shuva begins this way: All mitzvot of the Torah, positives or prohibitions, IF a person violates one of them, whether intentionally or inadvertently, WHEN he does T'shuva and repents his sin, he is obligated to verbally confess before G-d... It is as if the Rambam assumes that a person who sins will surely repent, but the VIDUI part, the verbalizing of the regret for the past and resolve for the future, the verbalizing of one's plea to G-d for forgiveness - this is what Rambam counts among the 613 mitzvot.

Bottom line: Is T'shuva an obligation - a mitzva? Of course it is. And where do we find it? In Parshat Nitzavim. Don't worry too much about the counting issue. It's definitely the proper thing to do. At this time of year... and always.

The last pasuk of the portion contains one of several ELULs, in the form of Rashei Teivot, initial letters. And G-d will circumcise **ET L'VAVCHA V'ET L'VAV** zar'echa, your heart and the

heart of your children. Baal HaTurim actually says that this is why we say S'lichot during Elul.

Chamishi 5th Aliya 4 p'sukim - 30:7-10

If (when) we return to G-d, then G-d will rain the curses (mentioned) upon our enemies. We have only to be faithful to HaShem and keep His mitzvot, and all His blessings will be showered upon us. Again a "pitch" is made for T'shuva. And again. And the T'shuva should be completely sincere.

Shishi - Sixth Aliya 4 p'sukim 30:11-14

[S>30:11 (4)] But how can we hope to keep our part of the agreement? Is not the Torah so exalted and remote that a mere mortal has no chance of attaining spiritual heights? The answer is eloquently stated in the famous words of the Torah - For this mitzva is not in the heavens nor is it across the ocean. It is so very close and attainable that every Jew can feel confident in taking up its challenges. It is up to us to make the commitment, feel it in our hearts, and ACT upon it.

This portion of the Torah can be understood as referring to the mitzva of T'shuva specifically, or to all of the mitzvot of the Torah. The words and the concept apply well to T'shuva, as they also apply to all of Torah. Perhaps this confirms what we said earlier

about T'shuva being a supra-mitzva. It has a wide-sweeping character that defies constricting it to an identity as a single mitzva in the family of mitzvot. This also can explain why the Rambam put Hilchot T'shuva in his first book which focuses on the fundamentals of Judaism.

Sh'VII Seventh Aliya 6 p'sukim - 30:15-20

[S>30:15 (6)] The concept of Free Will is beautifully expressed in the concluding portion of Nitzavim. It marks the difference between human beings and all other creations (including the bonobo!). The Sun and the Moon "fulfill" G-d's commands without conscious decisions. A bee doesn't think things out and decide to pollinate a flower (the Bee Movie, notwithstanding). Nor does a lion attacking a weak zebra evaluate the morality of his act. Only humans have the choice to do good or evil. G-d recommends and pleads with us to choose Life and Good, but He leaves the choice to us. That is why we are accountable for our actions; and that is why we stand before G-d in judgment on Rosh HaShana - animals do not. The choice is offered, but not only does G-d "command" us to choose Life, He warns us again of the devastating results of the wrong choice. Heavens and Earth are called upon to witness this most significant fact of human existence. It is the Land of Israel that is the "prize" for choosing wisely, as G-d

had promised Avraham, Yitzchak, and Yaakov. G-d reconfirms His covenant and promises to us.

We have Free Will. We can be whatever kind of people we choose to be. We have His "recommendation" and encouragement to choose Life over Death, Good over Evil. Our proper choices will earn us long life and a firm hold on the Land that He promised our ancestors.

Let us heed the warnings of Nitzavim, let us be inspired by the beautiful challenges of Nitzavim, let us be uplifted by the lofty messages of Nitzavim, and let us have a "successful" Rosh HaShana and Yom Kippur, and a happy & healthy year of peace & prosperity.

Haftara 23 p'sukim Y'shayahu 61:10-63:9

Seventh and final of the Haftarot of Consolation. Yeshayahu prophesies of when there will be universal peace and Jerusalem will not only be rebuilt, but will be the center of universal worship of G-d. Not only will the nations of the world recognize The One G-d, they will also acknowledge the People of Israel as His People. The idea of universal acceptance of G-d fits with our notion that ALL people are judged by G-d on Rosh HaShana, not just the Jews.