

TAZRI'A

27th of 54 sedras;
4th of 10 in Vayikra



Written on 128 lines (rank: 48)

9 Parshiyot; 5 open and 4 closed

67 p'sukim - ranks 48th - 8 in Vayikra

1010 words - 48th - 8th in Vayikra

3667 letters - 48th - 8th in Vayikra

Tazria is small. Only 6 other sedras are shorter - 2 others in Vayikra and the last 4 of D'varim

MITZVOT

7 mitzvot; 5 positives; 2 prohibitions

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.

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

Tazri'a is read alone in all SHANA M'UBERET (7 of 19 years) and together with Metzora in all SHANA P'SHUTA (12 of 19 years).

Kohen - First Aliya 13 p'sukim - 12:1-13:5

[P> 12:1 (8)] Perek 12, the shortest in the Torah with 8 p'sukim, deals with "birth". A woman becomes T'MEI'A (ritually unclean) following a (normal) birth - one week for a boy - and on the 8th day the boy is circumcised - and two weeks for a girl. This period of TUM'A is followed by a special "waiting time" - called Y'MEI TAHARA - of 33 or 66 days for boy or girl respectively, after which the mother is to bring the korbanot of a YOLEDET. The whole issue of the "ritual impurity of a woman having given birth" constitutes a mitzva [166, A100 12:2], as does the bringing of the sacrifices [168, A76 12:6]. This portion of the Torah is also the source of the general prohibition of eating "sacred meat" while in a state of "ritual impurity" [167, L129 12:4].

MITZVANotes

The mitzva of Brit Mila is found back in Parshat Lech L'cha and in this week's sedra of Tazri'a. Most mitzva counters point to Lech L'cha as the source of the mitzva, and not the more "logical" source in Tazri'a - logical because we find the language of a command: "Speak to the children of Israel saying..." In Lech L'cha, the mitzva is in

the context of the story of G-d's commanding Avraham to circumcise himself and the males of his household. True, the p'sukim there contain the language of a command that is defined as the mitzva in perpetuity, but the story is of a 99 year old man, his 13 year old son, Yishmael, and various non-Jewish slaves being circumcised. Why count it from Lech L'cha rather than Tazri'a?

The answer is fairly obvious, but let's say it anyway. BRIT MILA is a two-part mitzva whose two-word name tells us the story. MILA is the physical removal of the foreskin and whatever else is done by the MOHEL on the 8th day - or whenever, thereafter. The Mohel says the mitzva-b'racha AL HAMILA and then in a matter of seconds, that aspect of the mitzva is accomplished. The BRIT part of the mitzva takes much longer. As soon as the AMENs fade from the Mohel's bracha, the father of the boy makes a second bracha of mitzva - to enter him (the baby) into the covenant of (BRITO SHEL) Avraham Avinu. This is the multifaceted, long-term aspect of the mitzva that the parents continuously and variously fulfill as they raise their son to Torah, Chupa, and Maasim Tovim. The MILA part of circumcision comes from Tazri'a. The commitment part, the BRIT part, is from Lech L'cha. That's why our Sages pointed to Lech L'cha as the (primary) source of the mitzva.

Here's a 'nice' way to sum up the above. BRIT MILA. MILA is one of the Torah's mitzvot. BRIT represents all the rest of the mitzvot that go along with living a Torah life. Numerically, BRIT = 612, plus 1 for Mila = 613.

More. Because we have already been commanded on MILA back in Lech L'cha, the Gemara teaches us some "new" aspects of the mitzva from the "repetition" of the mitzva here. E.g. that an 8th day Mila can be performed on Shabbat. (And that this applies only to a birth through the birth-canal, as opposed to a C-section delivery whose Mila is not done on Shabbat.) That Mila cannot be done at night. And other details.

Ponder this... To over simplify: one aspect of the rules of ritual purity and impurity for a Yoledet (a woman who have given birth) is to show the sharp contrast between life and death. This can be seen in the Tum'a of a dead body, in the laws of Nida, the rules of pregnancy, as well as the Yoledet. A woman's period signifies that life has not begun within her - there is TUM'A. A pregnant woman has life developing within her - TAHARA. When that life emerges into the world, she is no longer carrying that extra life - TUM'A.

Another aspect of the procedures for the new mother is geared to help her recoup her physical, psychological and emotional identity and well-being.

[P> 13:1 (8)] After the parsha of BIRTH, the Torah moves on to the topic of NEGA'IM (various skin afflictions). The rest of Tazria (and most of Metzora) deals with these topics.

A person with an affliction that MIGHT be Tzora'at (in one of its many forms) is to be examined by a kohen (expert in the laws and identification of N'GA'IM, with a degree, perhaps, in dermatology, as well). Under certain circumstances, the kohen might declare the individual he is checking, a M'TZORA rendering him immediately TAMEI (ritually unclean). Or, a kohen might order a week-long quarantine with an additional examination to determine the status of the individual, to take place on the seventh day of said quarantine.

Levi - Second Aliya 12 p'sukim - 13:6-17

That second inspection can result in the person being declared "clean", or "Tamei", or an additional week of quarantine can be ordered.

[P> 13:9 (9)] A kohen must examine a case of suspected Tzora'at. He looks for changes in coloration of skin and hair, raised or sunken appearance of the blemished area, increase, decrease or no change in size, and other signs. Sometimes he declares

immediate Tzora'at. Sometimes "ritual purity" is declared immediately, in which case a trip to the pharmacy for a salve might be the best thing. And sometimes a quarantine period is declared.

The expertise of a kohen in the area of Nega'im is both an art and a science. And more. Dozens of shades of white and other colors must be distinguishable to the inspecting kohen. An error in perception of a white like the shell of an egg as opposed to the color of the thin membrane under the shell (for example) can make the difference between declaring the examinee TAHOR or TAMEI. Only certain times of the day are permitted for examining a NEGA, because of the different effects of light and shadow.

The laws of Nega'im are unbelievably difficult and complex. And, in addition to everything else, the kohen has to know the psychology of the cases and be sensitive to the personal situations of the afflicted. One example is that a new bride or groom is not examined by the kohen, so they cannot be declared TAMEI. That could spoil their moods. Which puts an obvious subjective twist to the topic of N'GA'IM.

A look at some of the Mishnayot in TAHAROT, even without going in depth, can give one an appreciation of what is involved in this topic.

Once again, learning comes to the rescue and allows us to get "involved" in mitzvot even when they aren't active.

Shlishi - Third Aliya 6 p'sukim - 13:18-23

[P> 13:18 (6)] The Torah presents further details on what the kohen looks for when inspecting boils and similar afflictions on the skin. The elaborate checking and time delays from inspection to inspection serve to give the afflicted person ample time for introspection. A NEGA on the outside mirrors a character blemish or a religious shortcoming on the inside. While the kohen examines the external, the Metzora does a thorough job of seeing his own inner being.

MITZVAnotes

Why all the detail? Why are there so many different types of N'GA'IM? Perhaps it is because WE are all different. So many different types of people. So many different temperaments. So many different sins. And so many different personal reactions to our individual situations. We need to feel this individuality. It helps us be responsible for our own deeds. One imagines that the kohen-examiner played the role of counselor too.

Maybe sensing a disturbed soul that needs TIPUL along with the NEGA.

Keep in mind that the whole topic of TZORA'AT and N'GA'IM tells us that the body and soul are intimately connected. Of course, we should know that already, but these mitzvot and details bring the point home.

As an analogy - something to think about - modern psychology recognizes a connection between the physical and the mental. Physical and emotional. The word that sums up this idea is "psychosomatic" - Of, or relating to a disorder having physical symptoms but originating from mental or emotional causes; Relating to or concerned with the influence of the mind on the body, and the body on the mind... Now just substitute the word spiritual for mental and you get a good picture of what N'GA'IM are about.

For example... A guy goes to his doctor complaining about headaches or rashes on his body (I know - that's two examples). The doctor checks him over - if he determines that the headaches or rashes are caused by physical problems, he might prescribe some medication or salves, respectively. But he might conclude instead, that the symptoms are caused by stress in the workplace (again, for example). In that case, the treatment is completely different. Different medication and/or counseling or a visit to a psychologist

might be the way to go.

In the time when the handling of NEGA'IM and TZARAAT as per the sedra was active, a person might still consult his doctor. If the doctor suspects NEGA'IM, he will refer the patient to an expert kohen. The kohen might send the person back to his doctor, having declared the person TAHOR, or he might pursue the handling of the situation according to the mitzvot and halachic details of NEGA'IM. It depends upon the view of the kohen.

R'vi'i - Fourth Aliya 5 p'sukim - 13:24-28

[S> 13:24 (5)] This portion discusses burns on the skin and different colorations within the affected area. Keep in mind that a blemish of any sort is NOT Tzora'at unless declared so by a kohen. It could look like Tzora'at, but it isn't unless declared TAMEI by a kohen. In fact, two people can have identical signs and one can be declared a Metzora, the other not so. And the treatment of each case is completely different as a result.

Chamishi 5th Aliya 11 p'sukim - 13:29-39

[P> 13:29 (9)] This next portion deals with yet another type or two of

N'GA'IM - sores on the head, neck, or face, and blotches on the skin. As was mentioned before, we are dealing here with a complex issue of a bridge between the physical and the spiritual. Or, to put it differently, of physical manifestations of spiritual problems.

The laws regarding the state of ritual impurity resulting from Tzora'at constitute a positive commandment [169, A101 13:29]. In other words, we would be doing the wrong thing to ignore these laws and details. Additionally, there is a specific prohibition of cutting the hair of a Tzora'at area on the body [170, L307 13:33]. Among other reasons, this would remove an important indicator for the inspecting kohen (and more importantly, perhaps, for the afflicted individual.)

Let's run with the analogy. If a doctor feels that a rash on a patient who came to him might be the result of stress and tension in the workplace, then it would serve no purpose to merely treat the rash. In fact, the rash might clear up after some stress-reduction measures without any treatment of the specific rash. In the case of N'GA'IM, it would be prohibited to treat the NEGA with physical means. Welts, burns, blemishes, boils, etc. might go away after T'shuva and the Tzara'at procedures. How can a korban heal an affliction? How can

T'shuva heal it? Same question as, How can psychological counseling cure asthma. But it can (sometimes) and so can all of the "remedies" in this week's sedra. Mind, body, soul - they are all connected and interrelated.

[S> 13:38 (2)] In this small parsha, the Torah gives an example of a rash of white spots erupting on the body. In this case, a rash is a rash. TAHOR.

Shishi - Sixth Aliya 15 p'sukim - 13:40-54

[S> 13:40 (7)] Certain cases of baldness are discussed in the first part of this portion. Usually, baldness is just baldness. But occasionally, the skin that is exposed when the hair falls out is blemished in specific ways which might mean Tzora'at.

A person who has Tzora'at, tears his clothes, lets his hair hang loose, and must announce in public that he is TAMEI. The proper conduct of the M'tzora is a mitzva [171,A112].

The rest of this Aliya deals with infection of Tzora'at on garments. Wool, linen, and leather are the materials that are subject to Tzora'at HaBeged. The laws of infected garments also constitute one of the 613 mitzvot [172, A102].

SDT: Baal HaTurim points out that pasuk 42 begins and ends with burning of the "infected" garment.

This teaches us that the method of disposal of something that is ASUR B'HANA'A (forbidden to derive any benefit therefrom) is by burning.

[S> 13:47 (13)] The rest of this Aliya deals with infection of Tzora'at on garments. Wool, linen, and leather are the materials that are subject to Tzora'at HaBeged. The laws of infected garments also constitute one of the 613 mitzvot [172, A102 13:47].

Sh'VII Seventh Aliya - 5 p'sukim - 13:55-59

The topic of "afflictions of garments" continues for the rest of the sedra. The fact that there is such a thing as an affliction of a garment tells us something. We are dealing with different ways that G-d communicates his "displeasure" with us, as individuals. Today, we might say, His communication is more subtle - but we must see it... and react appropriately.

Haftara - 22 p'sukim M'lachim Bet 4:42-5:19

The Haftara contains an episode with Elisha the Prophet and Naaman who, among other things, was a M'TZORA. The theme of the Haftara deals with miracles and the battle of Judaism against the powerful influence of Baal worship. In the Haftara, we can

see not only one who was afflicted by Tzora'at, but the implication that it can be caused by arrogance and excessive pride. The Haftara gives us the link between NEGA'IM and moral behavior. In addition, we see the effect of the cure on Naaman. Not only was his leprosy gone, but so was the arrogance that got him into trouble in the first place.

Statistically, this haftara is not read so often. Only in 16.32% of years (about once in six years) do we read it. The other times, we read HaChodesh or Rosh Chodesh, or the haftara of M'tzora. The last time we read this haftara was 21 years ago.