

M'TZORA HaGADOL



28th of 54 sedras; 5th of 10 in Vayikra

Written on 159 lines • ranks: 40th

6 Parshiyot, 3 open and 3 closed

90 p'sukim, rank 42 (5th in Vayikra)

1274 words, rank 39 (4th in Vayikra)

4697 letters, rank 39 (4th in Vayikra)

M'tzora's p'sukim are longer than average, hence its rise in ranking for words & letters

MITZVOT

11 mitzvot - all positive

FYI - just 5 other sedras have only positive mitzvot: B'reishit (1), Lech L'cha (1), Chukat (3), Pinchas (6), Vayeilech (2) - M'tzora has the most by far, among the sedras with only Mitzvot Asei

FYFI: Vayishlach, B'shalach, Vayakhel are the only sedras with only mitzvot Lo Taasei - one each.

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.

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

Kohen - First Aliya 12 p'sukim - 14:1-12

[P> 14:1 (20)] The afflictions presented in Tazri'a are dealt with by the procedures described in M'tzora.

The main theme of M'tzora is the "ritual purification" of the one afflicted with Tzara'at. These procedures constitute a positive mitzva [173, A110 14:2]. Two birds are to be taken, a ceremony is performed with them, one bird is slaughtered, and the other is set free. The person immerses in a mikve, he cleans his garments, and he shaves all the hair on his body [174, A111 14:9]. The rules of ritual immersion in general, come from this context [175, A109 14:9].

a long SDT: The 12th and final chapter of Mishna Chulin deals with the mitzva of Shilu'ach HaKen (the sending away of the mother bird who is on her nest of eggs or fledglings). The final mishna in that

chapter deals with the situation when that mitzva might clash with the purification of the M'tzora. What if the only bird available to the M'tzora for his atoning offerings is a mother sparrow hovering over her nest? Do we say the positive mitzva of Taharat HaM'tzora overrides the prohibition of taking the mother bird? This would seem to fit a general rule: a positive commandment overrides a prohibition (ASEI DOCHEH LO TAASEI). Yet this is not the case. Even for a mitzva, and even when the bird will be released alive(!), as is the case of the second of the M'tzora's two birds, one may not violate the Shilu'ach HaKen prohibitions. There are technical reasons based on the wording in the text of the Torah for this. And, Shilu'ach HaKen is not a "simple" prohibition, but involves an attached positive command.

But there might be another concept here. Shilu'ach HaKen is a "show-case" mitzva. It is one of the rare mitzvot for which a reward is specified - ARICHAT YAMIM (lengthening of life, the exact meaning of this is not clear - does it apply to this world or the next or both? - but the reward is expressed). The mitzva defies common logic and reasoning. It contains enigmatic qualities of a CHOK - a Divine imperative, not readily explainable. And its reward is implied for many other mitzvot by reasoning of a KAL VACHOMER - if this mitzva is

rewarded thusly, then certainly the more difficult mitzvot must carry with them great reward. (Although we are cautioned not to act in order to receive reward, and although we cannot compare one mitzva with another since we "don't know how G-d keeps score", we do have a sense of the truth of the logic expressed by the mishna.) Be that as it may, we can possibly learn that the pursuit of personal improvement may not be at the expense of others, be they human or animal. [Note: this is only food for thought, might not even be "correct" for this issue. One should not generalize to other areas of mitzva.]

BTW, the "rule" mentioned earlier whereby a positive commandment (sometimes) pushes aside a prohibition, does not operate when it is possible to satisfy the command without violating the prohibition. Since there is no requirement to take specifically a mother bird that is hovering over her nest, then the positive commandment of TAHARAT HAM'TZORA cannot override the LO TIKACH HA'EIM AL HABANIM prohibition of Shilu'ach HaKen. Additionally, Shilu'ach HaKen is not a pure prohibition because of the positive command to verily chase away the mother bird - SHALEI'ACH T'SHALACH... But the original point is still something to ponder.

Levi - Second Aliya 8 p'sukim - 14:13-20

The purification process is completed after bringing various korbanot, following a seven day period and the other procedures, as mentioned above [176, A77 14:10].

SDT: Notice how the M'tzora is isolated from others during the time he is ritually unclean. That gives him time to examine himself, his deeds, his thoughts. But as part of the process of purification, as part of the process of having a second chance in the world, he is ministered to by a kohen who becomes the first contact in his renewal procedure. There is a significant psychological factor at work in the area of NEGA'IM.

On another note... Notice the use of the blood of the korbanot as well as the oil that the purifying M'tzora brings. Many of the same things are done to both - sprinkling, dabbing the right earlobe, right thumb and right big toe.

Shlishi - Third Aliya - 12 p'sukim - 14:21-32

[S> 14:21 (12)] A person who cannot afford the animals for the sacrifices, is to bring one sheep and two birds as his offering. The Torah describes the rituals involved in these

offerings. Notice the 'repetition' of the details of the korbanot, rather than simply saying, "and the poor person's offerings are done the same way... It is not important how much the sacrifice is worth on a dollars and cents basis (shekels and agorot), but what is relative to the means of the atoner.

Thus ends the section of the Torah dealing with afflictions to the individual. ZOT TORAT... this is the body of law of one afflicted who cannot afford the full set of korbanot.

R'vi'i - Fourth Aliya - 21 p'sukim - 14:33-53

[P> 14:33 (25)] The Torah next discusses Tzara'at that can afflict a person's house. This can only be in the Land of Israel, in a house made of specific materials, and under specific conditions [177, A103 14:35]. Once again, it is the kohen who makes the determination as to whether Tzara'at does exist, or a professional house painter should be consulted. In the case of a "house plague", there are procedures to be followed and purification processes, including korbanot to be brought.

SDT: Not only does a person's body contain elements of spirituality, but even his home - specifically in Eretz Yisrael. Although we do not "practice" this whole topic today, the

lessons of the bridge and connection between the physical world and the spiritual one cannot be over-looked. A person whose home is a meeting place for Torah scholars, a launching pad for acts of charity and kindness, a training ground for a new generation of sensitive, feeling, enthusiastic Jews, such a home cannot be infected by spiritual plague. A home devoid of spirituality is a prime target for NIG'EI HABAYIT. In this case, it is not the anti-rust and anti-mold paint that makes the difference. It is the values that a Jew lives by and their effect on the next generation.

It is worthwhile to point out that the manifestation of a NEGA and some kind of rot, mold, fungus, or whatever can be EXACTLY the same. If a kohen sees it and declares ritual impurity, then it is a NEGA HABAYIT. And if he doesn't see it (and doesn't say it!), then it isn't. Even if a non-kohen expert in the field, identifies it as a NEGA. And it is possible that a kohen was about to declare a house TAMEI and he finds out that the homeowner is a CHATAN in his first week of marriage, then he won't make the declaration and there is no TUM'A. It is all "the way a kohen sees it".

Let's contrast this kind of TUM'A to that of TUM'AT MEIT. If a person dies in a tent, let's say, then anyone in the tent becomes TAMEI. Same for objects

that are subject to contracting that TUM'A. No one declares them TAMEI. They are automatically TAMEI by virtue of the fact that they were under the same roof as a dead body. But with NEGA HABAYIT, we find different rules. People and personal possessions are removed from the house before the kohein comes in to inspect. When he declares the house TAMEI, then it is and so are certain objects in it. An object that was in the same house minutes before - and nothing physically changed with the house in the meantime - but was removed before the declaration by the kohein, is TAHOR. Maybe we can say that TUM'AT MEIT is objective while the TUM'A of these N'GA'IM is subjective. There's a lot to ponder here.

GIMATRIYA

based on L'ORA SHEL TORAH

by R. Yaakov Auerbach ל"ר

Our sources clearly state that the (main) cause of Tzara'at is Lashon HaRa. This idea is beautifully reflected in the following Gimatriya.

The numeric value of NEGA TZARA'AT is 883. The prohibition of gossip and "evil tongue" is LO TEILEICH RACHIL B'AMECHA, "do not be a talebearer". Its numeric value is 883. Punishment for violating the 883-prohibition of Lashon HaRa is the 883-affliction of Tzara'at.

More... The proper way to avoid both the violation and its punishment is with MIDOT TOVOT (good personality traits) = 883.

And if we all can avoid Lashon HaRa and its punishment by developing those good traits, then TIZKU L'GEULA SHLEIMA (you shall merit the Complete Redemption) = 883.

Chamishi 5th Aliya 19 p'sukim - 14:54-15:15

This portion begins with a summary of different types of N'GA'IM.

The shortest p'sukim in the Torah have 3 words each. There are only 13 in the whole Torah. Here in M'tzora are two consecutive 3-word p'sukim - unique. Vayikra 14:55,56 -

*ULTZARAATHABEGEDV'LABAYIT.
V'LAS'EITV'LASAPACHATV'LABEHARET.*

Is there anything special about the 3-word p'sukim? Perhaps. Perhaps, not. In some Sidurim there is the list of the 3-word p'sukim (plus some other "special" p'sukim from Tanach) in the Motza'ei Shabbat readings (after Z'mirot). It is probably Kabbalistic.

[P> 15:1 (15)] Next the Torah speaks of the status of a man with an "unnatural discharge" (probably a form of venereal disease). In such cases, the Torah view matters as a combination of physical symptoms with spiritual causes - in the case of

ZAV and ZAVA, most probably attributable to sexual misconduct. (As such, there is a close relationship between the different themes of the sedra. Interesting, is it not, that there are doctors and clinics today that specialize in dermatology and venereal diseases. Interesting combination of specialties in light of this week's sedra.)

The one afflicted is himself TAMEI, as well as causing other people and objects to become "ritually impure" through contact, both direct and indirect [178, A104 15:2]. The one afflicted, must bring special korbanot after a purification process [179, A74 15:13].

Shishi - Sixth Aliya - 13 p'sukim - 15:16-28

[S> 15:16 (3)] There is also a "ritual impurity" (of a lesser degree - one-day type) in cases of normal seminal emissions [180, A105 15:17]. A woman who has relations with a man also contracts this one-day Tum'a.

A menstruating woman is "ritually unclean". This is counted as a positive mitzva [181, A99 15:19]; its negative counterpart is in the next sedra.

[P> 15:19 (6)] A woman with an unnatural discharge has a specific set

of rules. In the case of a ZAVA, there are differences in her status depending upon how many sightings of blood there are, and how frequent. These rules and procedures constitute a mitzva [182, A106 15:19].

[S> 15:25 (9)] The longer-term ZAVA is presented in its own parsha, a S'TUMA that can be seen as a sub-parsha of the previous P'TUCHA that introduced the topic of ZAVA. These rules and procedures constitute a mitzva [182, A106 15:19].

Sh'VII - Seventh Aliya - 5 p'sukim - 15:29-33

The requirement of the korbanot at the conclusion of the period of impurity constitutes a positive commandment [183, A75 15:29]. The people of Israel have a great potential for attaining spiritual heights. They have an equally great potential for descending to low levels of spiritual impurity.

Generally, when there is a rich man's korban and a poor man's korban for the same situation, if a rich man brings the less expensive version of the korban, he fulfills his obligation, after the fact. Tzora'at is an exception. If a rich man brought a poor man's offering, he has not fulfilled his obligation. The son of the Nodeh B'Yehuda beautifully explained why this is so. One of the causes of Tzora'at is stinginess. Even

the term in our Vidui can be seen as a play on words - TZAROT AYIN. If a rich man brings a poor person's korban, in this case it is an indication that he hasn't healed. The korban cannot bring atonement.

The last 3 p'sukim of the sedra (which are reread for Maftir - even on Shabbat HaGadol) serve as a summary to the topics of ritual purity and impurity and present the challenge to the Jewish People to rise above mundane physical existence by scrupulously avoiding "impurity".

SdT: Commentaries note that the laws pertaining to human beings (the sedras of Tazria and M'tzora) follow the laws pertaining to animals (Vayikra, Tzav, Shmini). This corresponds to the sequence of creation - animals were created before humans. If a person behaves in an improper manner, he is lower than an animal. And is reminded that "the mosquito preceded him". If however, he behaves properly, keeps the Torah and mitzvot, rises to the challenge of being holy, then he is worthy of having been created in the image of G-d.

Haftara 21+1 p'sukim - Mal'achi 3:4-24

The haftara speaks of faithfulness to Torah and the promise of the coming

of Eliyahu HaNavi as the harbinger of the Complete Redemption. That the second, to some extent, depends on the first can be seen in the closeness of the following two phrases: ZICHRU TORAT MOSHE... (remember the Torah, and keep it), and HINEI ANOCHI SHOLEI'ACH LACHEM and if you do, then I will send Eliyahu...

Note: The penultimate (next to the last) pasuk is repeated as the concluding pasuk of the haftara. This is done to end Malachi and Trei-Asar and the Nevi'im portion of Tanach on a positive note. (This is done three other times - end of Yeshayahu, Eicha, and Kohelet.)