



Mitzvot and Parshiyot Galore!

As listed in the Sedra Stats, Ki Teitzei has the most mitzvot of any sedra - 74, and the most parshiyot - 44.

For perspective: Second place on the mitzva chart - 63. Second place on the Parsha list - 35.

There are 12 one-pasuk parshiyot, 16 two-pasuk parshiyot. 6 three-pasuk and 6 four-pasuk ones. 1 five-, 2 six-, and 1 seven-pasuk parshiyot.

Seven of the parshiyot have none of the mitzvot, mostly because the mitzvot they have are counted elsewhere. The rest of the parshiyot have from one to three mitzvot.

With all of that said, I would like to discuss one two-pasuk parsha, each pasuk of which contains a single mitzva. The most common situation by far in Ki Teitzei is one topic, with 1-3 mitzvot per parsha. The exception is a parsha which has different mitzvot which one would expect to each be in its own parsha.

So when two different mitzvot share a parsha, one's eyebrow is raised. This happens a couple of times - I want to focus on one of them.

Specifically, D'varim 22:10-11.

The first pasuk says: LO TACHAROSH B'SHOR UVACHAMOR YACHDAV. The second says: LO TILBASH SHA-ATNEZ TZEMER UFISHTIM YACHDAV - Do not plow with an ox and a donkey together; do not wear garments of wool and linen combined.

The similarity in the wording of these two mitzvot is remarkable. LO-LO, do not. TACHAROSH-TILBASH, verb-verb. Ox & donkey, wool & linen - two things forbidden to mix. And each pasuk ends with the word YACHDAV - together.

Noticeably similar wording, but a very sharp difference between these two mitzvot. Plowing with two incompatible animals is a prohibition that lends itself to fairly easy understanding. Shaatnez is a classic CHOK, details of which defy logic.

But more startling is the difference between inclusive and exclusive components.

Ox and donkey - not just them but any two non-compatible animals are forbidden to harness together - on a Torah-level prohibition. This is not rabbinic extension and legislation; it is the transmission of the Oral Law which states that an elephant harnessed to two giraffes pulling a bandwagon with a small house and an elderly gentleman sitting on a rocking chair on the porch of the house, is as

much a Torah violation as plowing with an ox and a donkey. Ox, donkey, and plowing are inclusive of many, many other things.

(The scene described is from Dr. Seuss's first book - And to Think That I Saw It on Mulberry Street.)

SHAATNEZ is wool and only wool mixed with linen and only linen in a garment and only something that is worn or considered the same as wearing (like an upholstered cushion). SHAATNEZ is totally exclusive.

If we were to look at SHAATNEZ as one of the forbidden mixtures, being an animal-plant combination, joining the animal-animal mixing that is forbidden (crossbreeding of animals; meat in milk) and the plant-plant mixtures (K'lai Kerem; K'lai Z'ra'im), we might think that cotton and wool should also be a problem. That's a plant-animal combination too. But not only is cotton and wool not forbidden by the Torah, there isn't a rabbinic law saying so, nor even a minhag or chumra. And the fact that you can weave wool and linen together for the Parochet of the Aron Kodosh in your shul, without hesitation, says something about the exclusive definition of wearing. And the some of the garments of the Kohen Gadol (and the sash - AVNEIT, of all kohanim) were Shaatnez. The attempts at explaining the details are not for this PTDT, but they point to

Shaatnez being CHOK-ish.

There are many examples of words in the Torah that sometimes are exclusive and sometimes inclusive.

YOM can sometimes mean day but not night. Sometimes it refers to day and night.

BEN can mean son or child. Exclusive, inclusive. CHAMOR, donkey can represent all animals (finding a stray donkey and returning it to its owner applies to all animals) but with the requirement to redeem a firstborn male donkey - that mitzva is exclusively donkey.

How do we know when a word is one way or the other?

The answer is TORAH SHEB'AL PEH, the Oral Law. It is an inseparable part of Torah and very often teaches us the meaning of the Written Word. That's the long and the short of it.

The two mitzvot we have been focusing on, share very similar wording. And they are both forbidden mixtures. And they are very different each other on the exclusive-inclusive issue and the one is basically a Mishpat and the other a CHOK.

Maybe the summary point is that they are both mitzvot of the Torah. Maybe from one extreme to another, but still both are mitzvot. The point is that mitzvot come in different flavors - but they are all Mitzvot HaShem.