

CHUKAT

39th of 54 sedras;
6th of 10 in Bamidbar



Written on 159.2 lines; rank: 39

10 Parshiyot; 6 open, 4 closed

87 p'sukim; rank: 43rd

1245 words; rank: 40th

4670 letters; rank 41st

Smallest sedra in Bamidbar in lines,
p'sukim, words, and letters

Fewer p'sukim than Sh'mini, more words,
same number of letters. Chukat is a bit
longer.

MITZVOT

3 mitzvot of 613; all positive

PhiloTorah Stats Dept here - skip the following if you don't like stats.

Only 6 sedras (of the 54) have only positive mitzvot: B'reishit and Lech Lecha with 1 each, Metzora with 11, Chukat with 3, Pinchas with 6, Vayeilech with 2.

Again, to show the very uneven distribution of mitzvot in the Torah: Chukat has 3 (so do two other sedras). 26 sedras have more than Chukat; 25 sedras have fewer mitzvot. 3 is way below average (which is 11.4 mitzvot per sedra), but it is the median number of mitzvot in a sedra. About a third of the sedras have no mitzvot; about a third have more than 85% of Taryag; a little

more than a third have less than 15% of the Torah's mitzvot. That also means that more than two thirds of the sedras have less than 15% of the mitzvot.

Aliya-by-Aliya Sedra Summary

[P>] and [S>] 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.

Kohen - First Aliya - 17 p'sukim 19:1-17

[P> 19:1 (22)] This whole Aliya plus the first 5 p'sukim of the second Aliya deal with the topic of the PARA ADUMA. (These 22 p'sukim of Bamidbar 19 constitute the Maftir for Shabbat Parshat Para.)

The mitzva involves taking a cow with reddish hair (even two black or white hairs invalidate it), that is blemish-free (i.e. fit for the Altar even though the Para Aduma is NOT a korban; it is prepared away from the Mikdash and Har HaBayit, across the valley, on Har HaZeitim) and that has not worn a yoke or carried a burden for people. (If it carried upon its back something for its own benefit e.g. a blanket to keep flies away, it is still acceptable, but if it

carried a blanket for its owner's convenience, it cannot be used as a Para Aduma.) Elazar b. Aharon was in charge of the preparation of this first Para Aduma.

SDT: "And G-d spoke to Moshe and Aharon saying... DABEIR (you Moshe, not both of you, not DAB'RU) to the children of Israel... Only Moshe could tell the people about the PARA ADUMA, which is an atonement for the Sin of the Golden Calf. Aharon was too involved in the Golden Calf episode. He didn't tell this mitzva to the people and he didn't prepare the PARA ADUMA; his son did. Yet the pasuk tells us that G-d spoke to both Moshe and Aharon. Perhaps this contains a private rebuke by G-d to Aharon... And/or perhaps a bit of the opposite, since Aharon IS included in the command to prepare the Para Aduma.

SDT: Rashi says that the mitzva is for the assistant Kohen Gadol to tend to the Para Aduma, although any kohen qualifies. Commentaries see a symbolism in the son of Aharon doing it: just as the cow atones (so to speak) for her calf, so too the son atones for his father who was somewhat involved.

"Take a PARA ADUMA T'MIMA"
T'MIMA usually means blemish-free, fit for the Altar. However, here the word T'MIMA is followed by the phrase "that has no MUM (blemish)", making the adjective T'MIMA superfluous. Therefore, we are taught that T'MIMA in this context is describing ADUMA, indica-

ting that COMPLETE reddish hair is required. Without T'MIMA, a cow that was a "gingi" would be acceptable even if it had some non-red hairs. Not so, because of **ADUMA T'MIMA**.

As opposed to all korbanot in the Mikdash which had to be brought "inside" (the Beit HaMikdash area), the Red Cow is slaughtered and prepared "outside" (not even on Har HaBayit - across the valley on Har HaZeitim). It is not a korban, but it does have korban-like features (e.g. blemish-free, atonement).

After the cow is slaughtered, it is burnt whole, some of its blood having been sprinkled towards the Mikdash first.

The complete process of the Para Aduma (including what is thrown into the fire, how the ashes are collected and how the potion is made) is a positive mitzva [397, A113 19:2] that has been fulfilled nine times, so far. The next (tenth) time will be in the time of the Moshiach.

A person who comes in contact with a dead body is rendered ritually impure for a seven-day period [398, A107 19:4]. The "Para Aduma Potion" is to be sprinkled on the defiled person on the third and seventh day.

Without this procedure, the state of ritual impurity remains forever.

It is most important to avoid entering the Mikdash (and eating of sacred

foods) while one is defiled. Intentional violation is a (Divinely imposed) capital offense.

MITZVAnotes

Today, (temporarily) without a Beit HaMikdash, there are (at least) three ramifications of the rules of ritual impurity to the dead.

[1] A kohen must still avoid contact with a dead body (except those of his close relatives for whom he sits shiva), even though he is already TAMEI. This is both for "practice" as well as not to "add" to his state of TUM'A.

[Note: The seven relatives for whom a person sits shiva and the seven relatives for whom a kohein may become tamei are almost - but not quite - matched. Father, mother, brother, sister, son, daughter, spouse. A kohein (and all Jews) sit shiva for those relatives, and a kohein can become tamei to all of those relatives, but not a sister who is married. In other words, a kohein sits shiva today for his sister, but if she is married, the restriction against being M'TAMEI still applies.]

[2] We are not permitted to go onto Har HaBayit in those areas where the Beit HaMikdash and its courtyard stood (or might have stood).

[3] Some gifts of the Kohen (such as t'ruma, t'rumat maaser, challa) are not given to a kohen, but are "disposed of"

according to alternate halachic procedures, because of TUM'A of both the potential Kohen-recipient, as well as the giver, and the gift itself. Note that there are gifts to the kohen that pose no TAMEI problems; these are given today (e.g. Pidyon HaBen).

Levi - Second Aliya - 11 p'sukim 19:18-20:6

The Torah summarizes the Para Aduma procedures. Note that the cedar branch and hyssop are added to the potion as well as to the burning of the Para Aduma. Commentaries see special significance in the fact that the cedar is a lofty tree and the hyssop is a lowly shrub.

The dual nature of the Para Aduma potion (that it purifies the defiled and defiles the ritually pure) is counted as a mitzva of its own [399, A108 19:19]. And, it is this feature of the Para Aduma that is considered most mystifying and enigmatic.

Ponder this... As an analogy - there are certain medications for certain diseases, that when taken by a person with the disease, they are beneficial. Yet if a healthy person takes the same medication, he can get sick from it.

[P> 20:1 (6)] The next topic the Torah deals with is the death of Miriam in the Tzin Wilderness in Nissan (on the 10th of the month).

The Torah immediately tells us that

the People had no water. (Midrashim speak of Miriam's Well that miraculously accompanied the People during their wanderings. This well disappeared upon her death, since it was in her merit because she had watched over Moshe at the river that we had the Well.) The People complain bitterly to Moshe and Aharon.

The custom of emptying out water containers in the room in which someone has died, comes from the sequence: "...and Miriam died ...and there was no water..."

Commentaries point out a connection between Para Aduma and the death of the righteous Miriam. Both are "instruments" of atonement.

Shlishi - Third Aliya - 7 p'sukim 20:7-13

[P> 20:7 (5)] In response (to the complaint of no water), G-d tells Moshe to take the Staff, gather the People, and that he (Moshe) and Aharon should SPEAK to the rock in the presence of the People, so that the rock shall give forth its water for the People and their flocks.

Moshe gathers the People and admonishes them to witness another of G-d's miracles. He lifts the Staff and strikes the rock twice; water flows from it in abundance.

[S> 20:12 (2)] G-d is "angry" at Moshe and Aharon for missing a chance to

sanctify His Name by having the People see water come from the rock by speaking to it. (The People had previously seen water come from a struck rock.)

G-d decrees that neither Moshe nor Aharon shall lead the People into the Land of Israel.

Because of the inclusion of Aharon in this decree, there is an implication that he was not punished for any involvement in the Golden Calf - a point that needed clarification. Rashi says that the Torah is telling us that Moshe and Aharon would have gone into Eretz Yisrael, except for this, and only this incident. Interesting that Moshe himself tells the people (in D'varim) that he carries some of the blame for the Sin of the Spies. With Aharon's involvement in the Calf incident and Moshe's in the Spies episode, there is an interesting balance. On the other hand, Aharon IS held accountable in this case, even though it was Moshe who "acted".

G-d's decree seems excessively harsh on Moshe and Aharon. Commentators point to this as an example of how strictly G-d judges the greatest of our people. And the issue is a lot more complicated than that. It's not just 'punishment'.

Observation... Note that the rock gives forth water even though Moshe did not speak to it, as G-d had told him to. There are a few possibilities (maybe) as to why.

(1) It avoids a Chilul HaShem that would result if water did not come forth.

(2) Moshe Rabeinu was on the high level that he was able to control and divert nature (within limits). He had previously struck a rock to get water; this now is something he could do (and does).

(3) A twist on the Chilul HaShem possibility of (1) is that G-d wanted to avoid Moshe's losing face. G-d and Moshe are very much partners, so to speak, in the eyes of the People.

At the Sea, the people believed in "HaShem and in Moshe His servant, BASHEM UVMOSHE AVDO. In contrast, their lack of faith is expressed as their talking against G-d and against Moshe, BEILOKIM UVMOSHE. These are the only two times the word UVMOSHE (and in Moshe) appears in all of Tanach - with opposite connotations.

R'vi'i - Fourth Aliya - 8 p'sukim 20:14-21

[S> 20:14 (8)] Moshe sends messengers to the Edomites, to recount Israel's brief history and request right of way through Edomite land. The request is denied. A second attempt is made to obtain permission; this too is strongly rejected. The People of Israel change their route in order to avoid confrontation with Edom (according to G-d's command).

SDT: In asking for passage through

Edom territory, Moshe's messengers state that the people "will not drink water of a well". Rashi says that we would have expected the Torah to say "the water of cisterns". Rashi explains that Edom had the cisterns; we had a miraculous well (and Manna for food). What we were offering Edom were the profits from selling us food and water. We had no need for their food and drink, but it was a proper offer to make. Rashi says that when staying at an inn, one should partake of the inn's meals rather than "brown bagging it" (not exactly Rashi's term). This increases the benefit to the inn-keeper and is a proper thing for a patron to do.

SDT: Moshe sends a message to Edom saying, "...you know all the trouble we had in Egypt." Imrei Shefer asks, how was Edom expected to know what happened to us in Egypt? The answer, he says, comes from Parshat To'l'dot, when Rivka sought out G-d to explain what was happening inside her. She was told that she would have twins and that they would grow to head great nations, and when one fell, the other would rise proportionally. Edom's life must have made a significant turn upward, says Imrei Shefer, during the dark years we spent in Egyptian servitude - so they know what had happened.

Chamishi - 5th Aliya - 17 p'sukim 20:22-21:9

[P> 20:22 (8)] The People travel from

Kadesh to Hor HaHar. There Aharon is to die. Moshe takes Aharon and Elazar up the mountain, where the garments of the Kohen Gadol are transferred from Aharon to his son and successor. ALL the people mourn Aharon's death for 30 days.

COMMENTARIES POINT OUT that Aharon's death had elements that were missing in Moshe's. Seeing his son continue in his footsteps and being loved by all the people as Aharon was, adds a special dimension to Aharon's full life.

The Midrash says that the Heavenly Clouds that protected the People, left upon Aharon's death.

We can see now that the miracles of the Midbar were each associated with one of our leaders: Moshe, the Manna; Aharon, the Clouds; Miriam, the Well.

[S> 21:1 (3)] That made them vulnerable to attack from Emori. The People of Israel made a pledge to G-d and the Emori attack was successfully countered by Israel.

[P> 21:4 (13)] The People then tired of their extended travels and complained once again to G-d and Moshe. Their tirade included gross disrespect to G-d's miracle of the Manna. For this they were punished by an attack of "fiery" (poisonous) snakes that bit many people, causing many deaths. The People repented and pleaded with Moshe to pray to G-d to spare them. G-d told Moshe to fashion a copper (the choice of copper was Moshe's and

it was a play on words Nechoshet/ Nachash) snake and mount it atop a staff, so that anyone who would see it would live.

The Mishna in Rosh HaShana (3:8) asks, "What? (The copper image of) a snake can kill or restore life?" Not so, says the Mishna. "Rather, when the People of Israel look towards the Heavens and subjugate their hearts to G-d, then they were cured; and if not, they would decay."

The Mishna in P'sachim (4:9) records that Chizkiyahu HaMelech destroyed the Copper Serpent and the Sages approved of his actions. People were misusing it, and misunderstanding it.

This same kind of problem exists with the use of Korbanot in the time of the Beit HaMikdash, and in our time, amulets, Tashlich, Kaparot, visiting holy places, notes in the cracks of the Kotel, red threads around one's wrist, and even saying T'hilim - meaning that there are people who do certain things in lieu of heartfelt prayer and sincere kavanot, somehow expecting miraculous salvation. All of the above, to some extent, are meant to be incentive and inspiration to sincere repentance and prayer, not substitutes for them.

Shishi - Sixth Aliya - 11 p'sukim 21:10-20

The People continue their travels. They went to OVOT (identified as

being due south of the Dead Sea). From there they went to “desolate passes” or “the ruins of AVARIM” (different understandings of the phrase IYEI HA’ARAVIM), along Moav’s eastern border. They then continued on to NACHAL ZERED. Then to a part of the desert that was outside Moav territory (this because they were forbidden by G-d to encounter Moav.) These travels were recorded in the “Book of the Wars of G-d” (opinions differ as to what this was). Finally the people arrive at a place known as “the Well”.

[S> 21:17 (4)] This was another significant event related to water. From a physical point of view, water is by far the most valuable “commodity” of the wandering Nation. On a spiritual level, water represents Torah and Life itself.

The “Song of the Well”, a short but beautiful song is recorded, highlighting the preciousness of water. The words are filled with symbolisms and allusions.

The next piece of travelog is either part of the song at the well... or not. From the desert, the people went to Matana, from Matana to Nachliel, and from Nachliel to Bamot. From Bamot to HaGai in the field of Moav, on a cliff top that overlooks the Wastelands.

Notice that we have Songs over Water at both ends of the 40 years.

Sh’VII - Seventh Aliya - 16 p’sukim 21:21-22:1

[P> 21:21 (16)] As Israel nears the lands of Emori, requests are made for rights of passage. Not only are these requests denied, but Emori sends an army to confront Israel. Israel is completely victorious against King Sichon, and conquers the lands of Emori and Cheshbon. Further battles result in more Emori lands being conquered. Og, king of Bashan, also falls, as G-d promised.

SOT: It is important to note that Israel fights against whom G-d tells us to, and we do not engage in battle anyone that G-d forbids us to. It is irrelevant whether Edom was stronger or weaker than Emori. We didn't fight the latter and avoid the former for military reasons. G-d is our Commander-in-Chief. We must always keep this in mind.

SOT: Israel's military victories in the Midbar, towards the end of the period of wandering, were very important for the morale of the people as they faced long years of many battles upon crossing the Jordan River into Eretz Yisrael. In the Midbar, they get a taste of G-d's promises and might.

Moshe sends Meraglim to Ya’zer.

RASHI says that the spies who were sent said, "we will not do as our predecessors did; we have complete confidence in the

power of Moshe's prayer.” In a way, the sending of these Meraglim is a TIKUN (repair) of the Sin of the Spies. Spies were often sent to help plan the nation's next step. They were not meant to decide on what G-d already had decreed.

The final pasuk tells us that Israel traveled and arrived at Arvot Moav - this is their final stop before entry into Eretz Yisrael.

Note: We have four sedras of Bamidbar to go and eleven in D'varim, and we are already at Arvot Moav, With the conclusion of Chukat, we have arrived at the threshold of Eretz Yisrael. Way back in Mikeitz we left the Land and went down into Egypt. Now we are readying ourselves to return.

Haftara - 33 p'sukim - Sho-f'tim 11:1-33

The haftara consists of most of the story of Yiftach, the at-first scorned, later sought after, son of Gil'ad. He was shunned by his "half-brothers" and fled to the Land of Tov where he lived a rogue's life. The people of the Gil'ad region are attacked by the Ammonites and they pursue Yiftach to be their leader.

In the description of the wars with Amon, reference is made to the historical background of the area - specifically, the episode recorded in the sedra about Israel requesting permission from Emori for passage

through their territory. This is a major connection to the sedra. The story of Yiftach seems to be peripheral to the reason that Chaza"l chose this reading for Chukat.

And yet... the haftara ends with the first part of the story of Yiftach's vow and the resultant fiasco with his daughter. Chaza"l generally consider Yiftach to have erred; such a vow as his would be halachically invalid under the circumstances. The significance (if it does, in fact, connect to the sedra) of the story of Yiftach's daughter vis-a-vis the sedra is elusive. Actually, there is the vow that the people - correctly - made prior to battle. Yiftach's was way off.