

Understanding the Double *Parshiyos*

Some of the readers might have noticed something unusual this week and last. The *parshiyos* of *Vayakheil* and *Pekudei* are being read separately this year. While this fact in and of itself is not unusual, as it occurs whenever we have a leap year, since this is a common year, it is indeed unusual. This presents us with an opportunity to discuss the ins and outs of all the double *parshiyos* that occur throughout the year.

Introducing the Double *Parshiyos*

There are seven double *parshiyos*:

- 1) *Vayakheil-Pekudei*
- 2) *Tazri'a-Metzora*
- 3) *Acharei Mos-Kedoshim*
- 4) *Behar-Bechukosai*
- 5) *Chukas-Balak*
- 6) *Matos-Masei*
- 7) *Netzavim-Vayeilech*

The rules governing the double *parshiyos* are found in the *Shulchan Aruch (Orach Chayim 428:4-5)*. However, they are written in a cryptic style and it is difficult for the uninitiated to follow. We will therefore elaborate on these rules in an orderly fashion and provide the reasons why the *parshiyos* should be read together or separately.

Understanding the “*Kevi'us*”

Before we begin, we need to introduce a basic concept present in our calendar. There are fourteen calendar templates, seven used during common years and seven during leap years. Each template has a three-letter code that contains the basic information about that year. The code is called a “*kevi'us*.”

The first letter of the *kevi'us* tells us on which day of the week *Rosh Hashanah* occurs. The third letter of the code tells us on which day of the week *Pesach* will begin. The second letter tells us about the lengths of the months of *Cheshvan* and *Kislev*.

This refers to the following: All the months of the year, with the exception of *Cheshvan* and *Kislev*, have a fixed number of days – either twenty-nine or thirty. Only *Cheshvan* and *Kislev* are adjustable. When both have twenty-nine days, the year is known as “*chaseirah*,” or “lacking.” When they both have thirty days, the year is known as “*shleimah*,” “complete.” And when *Cheshvan* has twenty-nine and *Kislev* has thirty, that year is known as “*kesidrah*,” “according to its order.” (It is called this because when that occurs, the lengths of all the months alternate consistently throughout the year, thirty, twenty-nine, thirty, twenty-nine. The only exception to this pattern is *Adar Rishon* which has thirty days, as it follows *Shevat*, also a thirty-day month.)

The words *chaseirah*, *sheleimah* and *kesidrah*, are represented in the second letter of the *kevi'us* code as either *ches*, *shin* or *kaf*.

We will use this year's *kevi'us* (5785) of “*hey-shin-alef*” as an example: *Rosh Hashanah* was on Thursday (*hey*). The months of *Cheshvan* and *Kislev* were both thirty days (*shin*), and the first day of *Pesach* will be on Sunday (*alef*).

Let us now begin to examine each of the double *parshiyos*.

Vayakheil-Pekudei

These two *parshiyos* are always read separately in a leap year. In common years they are always read together, except during a year whose *kevi'us* is *hey-shin-alef*, such as this year. The calculation for this (in a common year) is as follows:

There are generally twenty-four *Shabbosos* between *Simchas Torah* and *Pesach*. The *parshiyos* in the Torah customarily *leined* between those two holidays are: twelve in *Bereishis*, eleven in *Shemos* and the first two of *Vayikra* – a total of twenty-five. In order to accommodate the fact that there are only twenty-four *Shabbosos*, we combine *Vayakheil* and *Pekudei*. We do this in order to read *Tzav* (the second *parsha* in *Vayikra*) before *Pesach*. However, in this year's *kevi'us*, *hey-shin-alef*, there are twenty-five *Shabbosos*, thus necessitating *Vayakheil* and *Pekudei* to be read separately.

The reason why we want to read *Tzav* before *Pesach* is because that *parsha* speaks about *koshering* utensils that have absorbed the flavor of *korbanos*. The laws of *koshering* utensils from *chametz* to *Pesach* are derived from the laws of purging *nosar* from the utensils in the *Mikdash* (*Biur Halachah* 428:4, s.v. *Tzav*, citing *Elyah Rabbah*).

How did we get an extra *Shabbos* this year? This is based on two factors:

1) *Shabbos Bereishis* was immediately following *Simchas Torah* on the twenty-fourth of *Tishrei*. (By way of comparison, when *Simchas Torah* falls out on Sunday, *Shabbos Bereishis* is delayed until the twenty-ninth of *Tishrei*.)

2) Both *Cheshvan* and *Kislev* were thirty days each. (This is very significant, as the extra day pushes *Pesach* to Sunday. Had *Cheshvan* been only twenty-nine days long, *Pesach* would have been on a *Shabbos*, and in order to move *Tzav* up one week, *Vayakheil* and *Pekudei* would be read together.)

In a Leap Year

As we mentioned, in all leap years, *Vayakheil* and *Pekudei* are read separately. In a leap year, there can be either twenty-eight or twenty-nine *Shabbosos* between *Simchas Torah* and *Pesach*, depending on the *kevi'us*. When there are twenty-eight, *Metzora* is read before *Pesach*. The connection between this *parsha* and *Pesach* is the *pasuk*, “a pottery vessel that the *zav* shall touch shall be shattered” (*Vayikra* 15:12). This is reminiscent of the laws of *koshering* (*Biur Halachah* 428:4).

When there are twenty-nine *Shabbosos* between *Simchas Torah* and *Pesach*, *Acharei Mos* is read on *Shabbos Hagadol*.

A Rare and Interesting Phenomenon

In order to understand the next point, an introduction is required. The sequence of leap years in our calendar is based on a cycle in which seven out of nineteen years have an extra month

added. The way these are usually counted, the third, sixth, eighth, eleventh, fourteenth, seventeenth and nineteenth are leap years, whereas the rest are common years.

Now for the interesting phenomenon: If either the seventh or the eighteenth year in the cycle (both common years) has the *kevi'us* of *hey-shin-alef*, we will have a situation of three consecutive years where *Vayakheil* and *Pekudei* are read separately. This works as follows:

As we said, when the year's *kevi'us* is *hey-shin-alef*, *Vayakheil* and *Pekudei* are read separately to accommodate the "extra" *Shabbos*. The years before and after those two years (either the sixth and eighth or the seventeenth and nineteenth) are both leap years, when *Vayakheil* and *Pekudei* are read separately in any event.

This is quite rare, as the last time this occurred was in 5584-5586 (1824-1826), and the next occurrence, according to our fixed calendar, will be in 5831-5833 (2071-2073).

A *Takanah* of Ezra

Before we discuss the next group of double *parshiyos*, we require an introduction. The *Gemara* (*Megillah* 31b) states: "Ezra instituted for the Jewish People to read the curses in *Toras Kohanim* (i.e., the *Tochachah* of *Bechukosai* in *Sefer Vayikra*) before *Atzeres* (i.e., *Shavuos*), and those in *Mishnah Torah* (i.e., the *Tochachah* in *Ki Savo* in *Sefer Devarim*), before *Rosh Hashanah*. What is the reason for this? Abayei, and some say, Reish Lakish, said: 'So that the year and its curses will end.'" The *Gemara* then wonders: "It is understood that the concept of 'ending the year and its curses' applies to the curses in *Mishneh Torah* (i.e., *Sefer Devarim*, which is immediately before the end of the year). However, concerning the curses in *Toras Kohanim*, is *Atzeres* a '*Rosh Hashanah*?' " The *Gemara* responds that indeed *Atzeres* is a "*Rosh Hashanah*," as it states in the *Mishnah* (*Rosh Hashanah* 1:2) that we are judged on *Atzeres* concerning the fruit of the trees.

The Triple Double-Header

Three of the seven double *parshiyos* appear in *Sefer Vayikra*: *Tazri'a-Metzora*, *Acharei Mos-Kedoshim* and *Behar-Bechukosai*

In a common year, these *parshiyos* are always read together and in a leap year, always separately. The reason for this is based on what we wrote earlier, that we want to read the curses of the *Tochachah* in *Bechukosai* before *Shavuos*. However, we do not wish to do so on the *Shabbos* immediately prior to *Shavuos*, as this would give an opportunity to the *Satan* to make an accusation. Therefore, we ensure that *Parshas Bamidbar* always intervenes between *Bechukosai* and *Shavuos*. This is accomplished by combining or separating the six *parshiyos* in *Sefer Vayikra* as necessary (*Biur Halachah* 428. s.v. *ule'olam*).

Since there are four extra *Shabbosos* in a leap year, we need four additional *parshiyos*. Thus, we separate the *parshiyos* of *Vayakheil-Pekudei*, *Tazri'a-Metzora*, *Acharei Mos-Kedoshim*, and *Behar-Bechukosai*, creating eight *parshiyos* instead of four.

A Variance in *Eretz Yisrael*

That which we said, that all the double *parshiyos* in *Sefer Vayikra* are read together in a common year is true all the time in *chutz la'aretz*. However, in *Eretz Yisrael*, this is not necessarily true. The explanation of this is as follows.

Pesach in *chutz la'aretz* is eight days long, while in *Eretz Yisrael*, it is only seven. Therefore, when the first day of *Pesach* is on *Shabbos*, in *chutz la'aretz*, *Acharon shel Pesach* is also on

Shabbos. However, in *Eretz Yisrael*, the last day of *Pesach* is on Friday. This means that on that *Shabbos*, while in *chutz la'aretz* they *lein* the special reading of *Yom Tov*, in *Eretz Yisrael*, they read the weekly *parsha* (*Shemini* in a common year, and *Acharei Mos* in a leap year). This creates a situation where the residents of *Eretz Yisrael* are one week ahead in the weekly *parsha*. In order to allow the residents of *chutz la'aretz* to “catch up,” in *Eretz Yisrael* they will separate *Behar* and *Bechukosai* and read them on two separate *Shabbosos*, while in *chutz la'aretz* they are read together. Later on, we will discuss how *chutz la'aretz* catches up in a leap year.

Chukas-Balak

These *parshiyos* are always read separately except in a year when *Shavuos* falls out (in *chutz la'aretz*) on Friday and *Shabbos*. This occurs when the *kevi'us* of the year is either *beis-shin-hey* or *gimmel-chaf-hey* in a common year, or *beis-ches-hey* of *zayin-shin-hey* in a leap year. In all of these situations, the first day of *Pesach* is on Thursday. When this occurs, *Chukas* and *Balak* are read together. (This occurs only in *chutz la'aretz* where *Shavuos* is two days.)

Since in *chutz la'aretz* they will be reading the special *leining* of *Yom Tov*, while in *Eretz Yisrael*, the weekly *parsha* will be read, the residents of *chutz la'aretz* need to catch up. They do so by combing *Chukas* and *Balak*.

It is interesting to note that since this occurs only in the above-mentioned scenario (i.e., *Shavuos* is on Friday-*Shabbos*), the calendar date of *Shabbos Parshas Chukas-Balak* can only be *yud-beis Tammuz*.

Matos-Masei

These *parshiyos* are always read together except for the following two *kevi'us* years, both of which are leap years: *hey-ches-alef* and *hey-shin-gimmel*, when they are read separately.

The reason for this is as follows: During those years, there are twenty-nine *Shabbosos* between *Simchas Torah* and *Pesach*, instead of the usual twenty-eight (during a leap year). This creates the situation where *Acharei Mos* is read on *Shabbos Hagadol* instead of *Metzora*. In the six weeks between *Pesach* and *Shavuos*, we then read from *Kedoshim* through *Naso* (inclusive). This creates the unusual situation where *Naso* is read before *Shavuos*, as opposed to afterwards. We then read during the six weeks between *Shavuos* and *Shivah Asar BeTammuz* the *parshiyos* of *Baha'aloscha* through *Pinchas* (inclusive). This creates the unusual situation of reading *Pinchas* before the Three Weeks (and we therefore read the rare *haftarah* of *Pinchas*, as opposed to the first of three special *haftaros* of the Three Weeks).

We now have only the *parshiyos* of *Matos*, *Masei* and *Devarim* to be read during the Three Weeks, as *Parshas Devarim* must be read on *Shabbos Chazon*, the *Shabbos* before *Tisha Be'Av*. This is because *Parshas Devarim* contains the rebuke of Moshe and the *haftarah* of *Chazon Yeshayahu* contains the rebuke of *Yeshayah* (*Biur Halachah* 428, s.v. *Tisha*). Therefore, *Matos* and *Masei* must be read in these years on separate *Shabbosos*.

However, in other years when *Balak* (or *Chukas-Balak*) is read on the *Shabbos* before *Shivah Asar BeTammuz*, we *lein* *Pinchas*, *Matos-Masei*, and *Devarim* on the three *Shabbosos* of the Three Weeks.

Another Variance in *Eretz Yisrael*

Earlier, we discussed how *Behar* and *Bechukosai* are read separately in *Eretz Yisrael* during a common year in order to allow the residents of *chutz la'aretz* to catch up in the weekly *parsha*. Now let us discuss what happens in a leap year.

As we said, in a year when *Acharon shel Pesach* occurs on *Shabbos*, the residents of *chutz la'aretz* fall behind in the weekly *parshiyos*. While in a common year, they catch up before *Shavuos*, in a leap year this is not the case. They cannot catch up during *Behar* and *Bechukosai*, as in any event these two *parshiyos* are read separately, as it is a leap year. Rather, the residents of *chutz la'aretz* remain a *parsha* behind until *Matos-Masei*. In *Eretz Yisrael*, these two *parshiyos* are read separately, while in *chutz la'aretz*, they are read together.

Netzavim-Vayeilech

The *Shulchan Aruch* (*Orach Chayim* 428:4) provides a mnemonic to remember when these two *parshiyos* are read separately. The *pasuk* states: “*Mipas bag hamelech*” (*Daniel* 1:5). This means, “From the king’s food.” The word “*hamelech*” alludes to *Rosh Hashanah* when we recite the *bracha* of “*Hamelech hamishpat*.” The word “*bag*,” *beis-gimmel*, refers to the days of the week, Monday and Tuesday. The word “*pas*” alludes to the idea of breaking something into pieces, as the *pasuk* states: “*Pasos osah pitim*,” “Break it into pieces” (*Vayikra* 2:6). Thus, the *pasuk* alludes to when the first day of *Rosh Hashanah* falls out either on Monday or Tuesday, *Netzavim* and *Vayeilech* are broken into pieces, i.e., read separately (*Mishnah Berurah* 428:8).

The reason for either combining or separating these two *parshiyos* is as follows: The first day of *Rosh Hashanah* cannot fall out on Sunday, Wednesday or Friday. This is referred to as “*Lo AD”U* (*alef-daled-vav*) *Rosh*.” This means that the first day of *Rosh Hashanah* can occur only on Monday, Tuesday, Thursday and *Shabbos*. When the first day of *Rosh Hashanah* occurs either on Thursday or *Shabbos*, there is no *Shabbos* in between *Yom Kippur* and *Sukkos*. This creates the situation that the last *Shabbos* during which we read the weekly *parsha* is *Shabbos Shuvah*. When that occurs, the *parsha* for *Shabbos Shuvah* must be *Ha'azinu*, the last *parsha* before *Vezos Habracha*, which will be read on *Simchas Torah*. Therefore, *Vayeilech* must be read before *Rosh Hashanah*.

There are always seven *Shabbosos* between *Tisha BeAv* and *Rosh Hashanah*, as the special *haftaros* read during those weeks are referred to as the “*shivah denechamta*,” “the seven consolations,” and the first of these must be *Parshas Va'eschanan*. This is because, as we mentioned, *Devarim* is always read on the *Shabbos* before *Tisha BeAv*. This means that *Netzavim* is always read on the *Shabbos* immediately before *Rosh Hashanah*. Therefore, when it is necessary to read *Vayeilech* before *Rosh Hashanah*, there is no choice but to combine it with *Netzavim*.

However, when the first day of *Rosh Hashanah* occurs either on Monday or Tuesday, there is an “extra” *Shabbos* in between *Yom Kippur* and *Sukkos*. In that case, *Ha'azinu* is read on that *Shabbos* and *Vayeilech* is separated from *Netzavim* and read on *Shabbos Shuvah*.

End the Year and its Curses

Earlier, we discussed the *Gemara* concerning Ezra’s enactment of when to read the *Tochachah* in *Sefer Vayikra* and in *Sefer Devarim*. This is so that the year and its curses should end. We also saw how this plays a role in the positioning of *parshas Bamidbar*, so that it should intervene between *Bechukosai* and *Shavuos*.

This idea also plays a role in the positioning of *parshas Netzavim*. Since the *Tochachah* is read in *parshas Ki Savo*, we want there to be a *parsha* intervening between that *parsha* and *Rosh Hashanah*. This is why *Netzavim* is always read on the last *Shabbos* of the year.

Matos-Masei vs. Netzavim-Vayeilech

The following question has been raised: In those years where it is necessary to divide *Netzavim* and *Vayeilech* and read them on separate *Shabbosos*, would it not be more practical to instead divide *Matos* and *Masei*? After all, when the latter two *parshiyos* are combined, an exceedingly long *parsha* is created, while *Netzavim* and *Vayeilech* are the two shortest *parshiyos*, and even when combined, it is still one of the shortest readings that we have.

Several answers have been suggested. These include:

- 1) If we were to separate *Matos* and *Masei*, this would push *Devarim* until after *Tisha BeAv*, and as we noted earlier, the theme of *Devarim* is appropriate to *Shabbos Chazon*.
- 2) One of the reasons why we want *Netzavim* to be read on the *Shabbos* before *Rosh Hashanah* is because it speaks about *teshuvah*, an appropriate pre-*Rosh Hashanah* topic. If we were to separate *Matos* and *Masei* and read *Netzavim* and *Vayeilech* together, this would push *Netzavim* until after *Rosh Hashanah* (*Biur Halachah* 428).
- 3) Earlier, we cited the *Gemara* that Ezra instituted to read the curses in *Sefer Vayikra* before *Shavuos* and the curses in *Sefer Devarim* before *Rosh Hashanah*. We also mentioned that we want to have a *Shabbos* in between the *Tochachah* and *Shavuos*. The same is true with the *Tochachah* in *Sefer Devarim*. We do not wish to read that *parsha* (*Ki Savo*) on the *Shabbos* immediately before *Rosh Hashanah*. Rather, there should be an intervening *parsha*. If we were to separate *Matos* and *Masei* and combine *Netzavim* and *Vayeilech*, *Ki Savo* would be read on the *Shabbos* before *Rosh Hashanah* (*Tosafos, Megillah* 31b, s.v. *kelalos*).
- 4) Rabbeinu Nisim Gaon maintains that when the *Gemara* states that Ezra instituted to read the curses of *Sefer Devarim* before *Rosh Hashanah*, this includes the curses contained in *Parshas Netzavim* (see *Devarim* 29:18-27). According to this, it is necessary to read *Netzavim* before *Rosh Hashanah*, and this could not happen if *Matos* and *Masei* are read separately. It should be noted that this explanation counters the previous one of *Tosafos* (see *Tosafos, Bava Basra* 88b, s.v. *vekilalam*).

Conclusion

Studying the workings of our calendar is awe-inspiring. It gives us a glimpse into the sagacity of *Chazal*, as they were able to create such a perfect system that has withstood the test of time. Although it has endured for over sixteen centuries, we must realize that it is only temporary and we must *daven* to Hashem that He will soon rebuild the *Beis Hamikdash*, reestablish the *Sanhedrin* and *beis din* will once again declare *rosh chodesh* on a monthly basis.

Most of the information contained in this article was gleaned from *Shaarei Zemanim* (#20), written by my esteemed colleague, Rav David Heber.

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