

On One Foot - Out of Sync with Israel

Welcome back to all our congregants who celebrated Pesach in the Holy Land. As you step into shul this Shabbat we greet you with déjà vu, or perhaps, déjà entendu.

Seventh day Pesach was Friday. Last Shabbat in Israel, on a chametz-free first day after Pesach, the Israeli minyanim leined Parashat Acharei Mot. For Disapora communities Shabbat was Eighth day Pesach, with the appropriate Yom Tov leining. We shall lein Acharei Mot this week (again if you were in Israel) while Israelis will read Kedoshim. Our communities will remain out of sync till after the double Parasha of Mattot Maasei on August 6. We will not be leining the same Kriyat HaTorah till 13th August when both will lein Devarim (which is always read the Shabbat before Tisha B'Av).

This is as long a stretch as ever happens (15 weeks or half of Sefer Vayikra and all of Bemidbar) and it is most unusual.

How we came to separate the leining is the easy one to explain. The length of the gap is a tad harder.

As is known there are 54 Parshiyot to cover between one Simchat Torah and the next. In any non-leap year that's fewer than 52 weeks so there's a little doubling up. Depending on circumstances the following Parshiyot are able to be combined:

Vayakhel & Pekudei , Tazria & Metzora, Acharei Mot & Kedoshim, Behar & Bechukotai, Chukkat & Balak, Mattot & Maasei, and Netzavim & Vayeileich.

In a leap year there is less cause to double up but there are other factors which come into play like the loss of Shabbatot to Yom Tov & Chol Hamoed and the need to position certain Parshiyot ahead of or after certain calendar landmarks.

The Parasha distribution remains substantially undefined in the Talmud but from Megilla 29b we learn that the admonitions (and curses) of Bechukotai and Ki Tavo should be read before Shavuot and Rosh Hashana respectively and are ideally separated by a "buffer" week (Bemidbar & Nitzavim) so that we do not come into Yom Yov with a negative mien.

In the Shulchan Aruch (Orech Chayim 428:4) four "checkpoints" are established.

- In a non-leap year Tzav is read before Pesach and in a leap year Metzora (except when a leap year has Rosh Hashana on a Thursday and both Cheshvan and Kislev are 29 days or both 30 days) in which case Acharei Mot is read before Pesach.
- Bemidbar is always read before Shavuot.
- Tisha B'Av is always before Vaetchanan.
- Nitzavim is always before Rosh Hashana.

The astute will immediately have noticed that if Israel read Kedoshim this week and we had combined Acharei Mot and Kedoshim, the sync problem would have been instantly resolved. Moreover, we are skipping two further potential combined parshiyot before our paths converge.

This year is a leap year and Rosh Hashana was Monday, so we read Metzora on the Shabbat before Pesach. In order to place Vaetchanan the Shabbat after Tisha B'Av, Israel had to have single Parshiyot every week (meaning that Bemidbar necessarily falls two weeks before Shavuot).

However in Diaspora, without combining, we can have Bemidbar at its ideal slot. Why not combine immediately thereafter? According to the Maharit (R' Joseph Trani 1538–1639), one of the most

eminent Talmudists of his day, it is considered preferable to combine in such a way that we demonstrably put Vaetchanan in the right place and to highlight the “checkpoint”, rather than doubling up earlier.

We'll then remain in step with Israel till 7th April 2018. By which time, IY”H we'll all be living there in security and in peace!