

Chayei Sara

5th of the 54 sedras;
5th of 12 in B'reishit

Written on 171 lines in a Torah, rank 37

4 Parshiyot; 3 open, 1 closed

105 p'sukim - ranks 32nd (11 in B'reishit)
same as D'varim (which is longer)

1402 words - ranks 37th (11 in B'reishit)

5314 letters - ranks 36th (11 in B'reishit)

Shorter than average p'sukim in a sedra
with slightly below average number of
p'sukim means a smallish sedra

MITZVOT

None of the 613 mitzvot are in Chayei Sara,
however, as we mention often, there are
Midot and values and other lessons to be
learned.

This is one of 17 mitzva-less sedras, 9 of
which are in Sefer B'reishit, 3 in Sh'mot,
none in Vayikra, 2 in Bamidbar, and 3 in
D'varim.)

[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.

Kohen - First Aliya 16 p'sukim - 23:1-16

[P> 23:1 (20)] The parsha begins by
telling us that Sara died in Kiryat Arba,
which is Hevron. But first it tells us
that she lived a full, long life of 127
years.

SDT With the last topic of Vayeira
being the AKEIDA, the juxtaposition of
Sara's death supports our Tradition that
Sara died as a result of the Akeida. The
Midrash says that the Satan informed
Sara about what Avraham was
intending to do with Yitzchak, when
they went towards Har HaMoriah. The
shock was too great for an old woman,
and she died.

Some commentaries give an interesting
twist to this. They say that Sara died,
not from fear that Avraham would offer
Yitzchak as a Korban, but rather that he
might not! She remembered Avraham's
reaction when she told him to banish
Yishmael (and Hagar). She was afraid
that Avraham's love and kindness
towards Yitzchak would prevent him
from carrying out G-d's command, and
that Avraham would thus fail this
ultimate test of faith. When she saw (or
heard) that Avraham was returning
with Yitzchak still alive, she thought her
fears were realized and she died.

Avraham comes (some say from the
Akeida, i.e. from Har HaMoriah; some
say from Be'er Sheva; either way, it was
apparently to Hevron that he came) to
eulogize Sara and to cry for her.

SDT V'LIVKOTAH, and to cry for her, is written with a small KAF. Some take this as a reminder that the crying was "small" since Sara had lived such a long life (Baal HaTurim). There is more crying when a person dies young.

Some say that the KAF points to the 20 in the way that the Torah tells us how old she was when she died: 100 years and 20 years and 7 years.

Others say that the small KAF allows us to reread the word with regular-sized letters only to obtain a different understanding, on a hint (REMEZ) level. And Avraham came to eulogize Sara **ULVITAH**, and for her daughter. This correlates with the opinions that Avraham and Sara had a daughter, but that she died when Sara did. (Some even say that her name was BAKOL - see further.)

Avraham next makes the arrangements for providing a suitable place to bury Sara. (There is a Tradition that Avraham was aware of the burial place of Adam and Chava, and that is the piece of land he was interested in.) He turns to the people of CHEIT, one of whom is known as EFRON. They all exchange niceties and the people offer Avraham any land he wants. He insists on paying full price and that is what he does for the field and cave of Machpela.

PIRKEI AVOT made famous that Avraham was tested 10 times. But the mishna does not enumerate the ten tests. There are different opinions as to

which of Avraham's experiences are considered tests of his faith. Most lists of the 10 end with the Akeida, as implied by the p'sukim themselves. Rabeinu Yona finds a test after the Akeida - Avraham's experience in providing a burial place for Sara. The question on this is obvious - What was so difficult about that, that it should qualify as a test of faith - especially after the Akeida?

Perhaps the answer lies in the fact that after the Akeida, Avraham still had a couple of difficult things to go through. Wasn't the Akeida and everything that preceded it enough? No, not finished yet. This can test a person, sometimes, more than terrible trials and tribulations.

As an example closer to us... Surviving the Holocaust did not guarantee a person that he would have an easy life from then on. Some were blessed with trouble-free lives after their terrible ordeals, but most had many more difficulties to face in the years to come. That is truly a test of one's faith in G-d.

We do not know how G-d works. Why must we suffer trials and tribulations in this world? It has something to do with making us better people. With challenging us. With testing us. With preparing our souls for the World of Truth. And probably a lot more.

There is another approach to answer the same question. Eulogizing his wife, acquiring a burial place, finding a "shiduch" for Yitzchak - even remarrying Hagar (Ketura) are all "regular", mundane experiences. Can

one who spoke repeatedly to G-d, ascended Har HaMori'ah, had a special relationship with G-d - can such a person return to being a "normal" human being? This too is a test, and Avraham passed with flying colors. These commentaries point to the pasuk at the end of the Akeida portion, "And Avraham return to the lads..." as an indication that he was able to "come back down to earth".

SDT If a father insists that his son marry or not marry a particular woman, the son is not duty-bound to listen to his father. Meshech Chochma says that we learn this from the fact that Avraham gave instructions and administered an oath to Eliezer about a wife for Yitzchak, but did not command Yitzchak himself on the matter.

Levi - Second Aliya 13 p'sukim - 23:17-24:9

The field, cave, trees, etc. become the lawful property of Avraham, after which he buries Sara.

[S> 24:1 (67)] Avraham is now at an advanced age and has been blessed greatly by G-d. "And G-d blessed Avraham BAKOL", with everything.

The word **BAKOL** screams out for explanation. And, sure enough, there are many suggestions as to what this extra blessing of **BAKOL** is. (Every time we say Birkat HaMazon, we ask G-d to bless us as He blessed our forefathers - BAKOL... Mikol and Kol are terms associated with Yitzchak and Yaakov.)

The numeric value of **BAKOL** 52, the same as BEN, son. This alludes to the ultimate blessing that Avraham received - his son Yitzchak.

Gimatriya play: As just mentioned, some point to the numeric value of BAKOL - which is the same as BEN (52). ELIYAHU = 1+30+10+5+6 = 52. Tradition says that ELIYAHU was PINCHAS (or is it the other way?). The gimatriya of PINCHAS is 208, the same as that of YITZCHAK. From BAKOL to BEN to ELIYAHU to PINCHAS to YITZCHAK. Note too that 208 is a multiple of 52 - so what? Who knows? By the way, YOSEF=156, also a multiple of 52. As long as we started, let's go a little further. Joining ELIYAHU at 52 are G'DALYA, KALEV, and one of David HaMelech's wives, AVITAL. NACHUM and MANO'ACH, which are anagrams of each other, are each 52x2. Joining YOSEF at 3x52 are VOFSI - an anagram - and YECHEZKEL. And joining YITZCHAK and PINCHAS at 4x52 is HAGAR.

R. Meir says that Avraham was blessed by NOT having a daughter. In Avraham's time and in his unique circumstances, who would she have married? What would have happened to her? In this case it was a bracha not to have had a daughter.

On the other hand... R. Yehuda says that Avraham's extra blessing was that he DID have a daughter. There is even an opinion that his daughter's name was BAKOL (as mentioned earlier).

Rabbi Eliezer HaModai says that Avraham was blessed with the art/

skill/power of astrology and that he was consulted by noblemen from far and wide. (Even when G-d told Avraham that he would have a child, Avraham resisted because he had seen in the stars that he was not going to have children. G-d "explained" to Avraham that it is possible to rise above one's "mazal", and in fact, that is the special quality of the nation that will come from him. **אין מזל לישראל**. Ibn Ezra says in the name of our Sages z"l, true, but only as long as we keep the Torah.)

R. Shimon bar Yochai says that Avraham had a precious stone (see footer - left icon) with curative powers that would heal all who gazed upon it.

These last two opinions identify BAKOL as Avraham's prominent position in the world. This fits with his role as "father of many nations".

Some suggest that Eisav's not sinning (until Avraham died) and Yishmael's repentance during Avraham's lifetime are the extra blessings.

There are still other explanations.

From the variety of explanations of BAKOL, it is quite clear that the unique status of Avraham as the one who restored belief in One G-d to the world did not go unrewarded. We can see in this list of blessings, different kinds of blessings that can be ours, the spiritual heirs of Avraham Avinu.

The one major task remaining, which will forge the next vital link in what promises to be a great people and a great Chain of Tradition, is finding a

suitable "shidduch" for Yitzchak. Everything now will depend upon Yitzchak. However great Avraham was, unless there is "solid" continuity, all will be lost. To this end, Avraham calls upon Eliezer to swear that he will faithfully carry out his task, that he will return to Avraham's family and hometown, and find a wife for Yitzchak there. And that Yitzchak is not to leave Eretz Yisrael (having been consecrated on the Mizbei'ach at the Akeida).

Shlishi - Third Aliya 17 p'sukim - 24:10-26

Eliezer (who is exclusively referred to as "The Servant" or "The Man", as opposed to by name - **his name never appears in Parshat Chayei Sara**, where we would have expected to find it repeated over and over - takes ten camels laden with a splendid assortment of goods and travels to Avraham's hometown. Upon arrival, he ties the camels up near the well (and spring), towards evening, at the time when the local girls come to draw water. He asks G-d to be kind to his master Avraham. Eliezer asks for a sign - the girl who will offer him drink and also for his camels, she will be the one sent by G-d. Almost before he finished speaking, Rivka bat Betu'el of Avraham's family arrives on the scene with her water container on her shoulder. Eliezer runs to her and asks for a bit of water. She immediately

gives him his fill and then draws water for his camels. Anxious to find out whether she was "the one", Eliezer waits until the camels have their drink and then presents Rivka with gifts of jewelry. (On the one hand, he has seen her kind nature and tireless act of chesed; on the other hand, he has not even yet asked her who she is.) When Rivka tells Eliezer that she is indeed from Avraham's family and invites him to stay at her home, he prostrates himself before G-d in grateful acknowledgment.

R'vi'i - Fourth Aliya 26 p'sukim - 24:27-52

Eliezer also says a blessing to G-d for not abandoning Avraham or withholding Divine Kindness from him. Rivka runs home to tell her family what has happened. Lavan (filled with ulterior motives, our sources tell us) runs to greet Eliezer. The gold jewelry adorning Rivka catches Lavan's eye, and he "graciously" offers Eliezer hospitality. Eliezer is served food but refuses to eat until his "business" is completed.

Eliezer proceeds to tell the story of his mission. He tells of Avraham and Yitzchak and of being sent to find a wife for Yitzchak. When he asks for Rivka's hand on behalf of his master, Lavan and Betu'el (commentaries point to Lavan's pushing himself before his father as an indication of a negative personality trait) accept all as G-d's

will.

Eliezer again prostrates himself before G-d in grateful acknowledgment of the success of his mission.

Chamishi 5th Aliya 15 p'sukim - 24:53-67

Eliezer gives more gifts to Rivka and her mother and brother, then they all celebrate with food and drink, and Eliezer and his party stay overnight. In the morning, Eliezer asks his leave. Rivka's family asks that she remain for a year, or at least ten months (as was the custom in olden times) but Eliezer insists on leaving immediately (and taking Rivka with him). Rivka is consulted and she agrees to leave right away. They send her off with a "maid" (later identified as Devora) and bless her.

This blessing has been repeated countless times to Jewish brides throughout the generations. Ironic, is it not, that we use Lavan's words for such a special occasion.

Rabbi Sholom Gold speculates as to how a girl growing up in the house of Betuel and Lavan can so quickly step into Sara Imeinu's shoes. His answer (beautifully developed in a shiur) is that it was D'vorah, Rivka's nursemaid, who was her teacher and influence in the ways of Sara. D'vorah was left behind when Avraham and Sara "made Aliya", for just this purpose.

Shishi - Sixth Aliya

11 p'sukim - 25:1-11

[P> 25:1 (11)] Avraham, having successfully provided for the continuity of what will become the Jewish Nation, now lives out the remainder of his life as a "private citizen", so to speak. He takes for himself a wife named KETURA (which we are taught was HAGAR) and fathers six more children. He gives them gifts, but Yitzchak remains Avraham's exclusive spiritual heir. (We can really say that in some ways, other peoples of the world followed Avraham's lead in living monotheistic lives, but the Torah's definition of Avraham's lineage is Yitzchak.)

On the question of the different treatment of Yishmael (banishment) and the children from Ketura (gifts), it can be explained that there was a crucial difference between Yishmael and Ketura's children. Yishmael challenged Yitzchak's inheritance. He claimed (and in some ways continues to claim) Avraham's legacy. When G-d told Avraham to listen to Sara, He told him to banish them, BECAUSE in Yitzchak will be called your offspring, your descendants. This point had to be made, and a farewell party and lavish provisions for the journey would not have made the point. No such problem with Ketura's children. They made no such claim. They did not dispute Yitzchak's role. They received gifts.

Avraham dies at the "ripe old age" of 175 (actually, this is 5 years short of the

complete 180 that Yitzchak later reached - various reasons are given for the "lost" 5 years). His was a graceful, good, and fulfilling life (despite the tough times he had). He is buried in the Cave of Machpela, where he had buried Sara. Both Yitzchak and Yishmael take care of the burial.

The Torah implies that Yishmael had repented his ways and had become righteous. What greater "nachas" for a father than that!

G-d blesses Yitzchak after Avraham's death.

From Avraham's marrying Ketura only after Yitzchak was married, the Baal HaTurim says that the proper thing to do is to marry off your children, before you remarry.

Sh'VII Seventh Aliya 7 p'sukim - 25:12-18

[P> 25:12 (7)] The descendants of Yishmael are now enumerated. Yishmael is identified fully as the son of Avraham and Hagar the Egyptian maiden of Sara who bore Yishmael "to Avraham". (This is quite parallel to the description of Yitzchak's connection to Avraham as stated in the beginning of next week's sedra. This might further indicate Yishmael's T'shuva in his later years. On the other hand, commentaries point out that the word TO-L'DOT in the Yishmael context is spelled without any VAVs, indicating a lesser status to Yishmael.) It is

noteworthy that Yishmael fathered twelve sons (not like Yitzchak, but like Yaakov). Note that both Nachor and Yishmael had their 12 descendants way before we did. This indicates a tougher life for the Jewish people (something that has been borne out over and over again in the course of Jewish History, right up to current events).

Yishmael dies at the age of 100 and 30 and 7 years. The wording in the Torah (seems to) purposely parallels that which was used to describe Sara's lifespan, a further indication (perhaps) of the change for the better in Yishmael. Rashi says that the age of Yishmael is included to help us compute the chronology of Yaakov.

The last 3 p'sukim are reread for the Maftir.

Haftara 31 p'sukim Melachim Alef 1:1-31

The sedra tells of the aging Avraham and his task of providing for the continuity of his beliefs through his son Yitzchak (even though there were other potential heirs). The Haftara parallels this theme by telling us of the aging King David with many potential heirs, providing that it would be his son Shlomo who would be the next link in the Davidic line. This, fulfillment of a promise made to Shlomo's mother, Batsheva - similar to the promise made to Sara that her son would inherit. The starting points are Avraham Avinu and

David Hamelech. But no matter how strong their personalities were, the chain ends with them unless the next generation is as strong as a Yitzchak Avinu and a Shlomo HaMelech.

PROBING the PROPHETS

This week's haftara, a selection taken from the opening perek of Sefer M'lachim Alef, focuses upon two seemingly different events. The first psukim describe for us the final days of David HaMelech, chronicling his physical weakness and the necessity of finding a "sochenet", an attendant whose proximity to the King would help keep him warm. The rest of the chapter focuses upon the attempts of Adoniya, David's oldest surviving son, to take over the throne and force the royal succession to follow his family and not that of Shlomo, the heir apparent. When studying these events we are led to ask the simple question of what connection could there be between the two stories and why was the opening episode, a seemingly minor event, even included in the holy text. But it would be a mistake to take the approach that these are two separate stories with no real connection when, in truth, it is the first episode that led to the second.

It was the physical weakness of the King, seen in his inability to keep warm, and his detachment from what was occurring outside the palace, proven by the fact that he had to be informed of the rebellion, that gave the impetus to Adoniya and his supporters to gather followers and publicly proclaim the throne for

Adoniya. Furthermore, the same Adoniya would later request that David's royal attendant, Avishag, be given to him as a wife, for an act of marrying the former king's servant that substantiate the claim that he, not Shlomo, was the true successor.

In past articles, we have addressed the contrast between Yitzchak's peaceful succession of his father Avraham with Shlomo's stormy succession of David HaMelech. But it is important to compare the behaviors of both "successors", Yitzchak and Shlomo. In both cases the sons took no part in the choice. Both Yitzchak and Shlomo were passive and showed no involvement in their fathers' choices to have them carry on their leadership. In fact, the entire Sefer B'reishit can be described as a struggle for bechora, bechira and bracha; a story of children claiming the bechora - the first born birthright, in order to merit the bechira - the choice to receive the bracha, Hashem's special blessing. Yet in each case it was not the b'chor, the firstborn who was chosen; neither Yishma'el nor Eisav nor Reuven were chosen.

And the lesson we learn is the same one taught to us by the haftara: leadership is not to be determined by birth but by deed. G-d's choice is "merit-based", which is also why Shlomo and not the eldest (surviving) son, Adoniya, was chosen. We are judged by what we do, by what we accomplish and not by accident of birth.

Probing the Prophets, weekly insights into the Haftara, is written by Rabbi Nachman (Neil) Winkler, author of Bringing the Prophets to Life (Gefen Publ.)