

TO-L'DOT



6th of the 54 sedras;
6th of 12 in B'reishit

Written on 172.7 lines, ranks 36th

4 Parshiyot; 2 open, 2 closed

106 p'sukim, ranks 29 (9th in B'reishit)

Tied with Vayigash and Bo; shorter than
each in words & letters and length

1432 words, ranks 34 (10th in B'reishit)

5426 letters, ranks 33 (10th in B'reishit)

Its p'sukim are below average in length

MITZVOT

None of the 613 mitzvot are in Toldot,
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 21 p'sukim - 25:19-26:5

[P> 25:19 (16)] This is the history of
Yitzchak b. Avraham; Avraham
fathered Yitzchak.

SDT Rashi quotes the Gemara that
tells that when Yitzchak was born,
scoffers said that Avraham and Sara,
who were old and childless for so long,
had found a baby and claimed it as
their own. Avraham invited the leaders
of the nations, their wives and infants,
and Sara miraculously was able to
wet-nurse all the babies - not just her
son Yitzchak. (The Gemara points to the
plural "banim" in 21:7.) Then the
scoffers accepted that Sara bore
Yitzchak, but chided Avraham that
Avimelech was the father (since
Yitzchak's birth followed Sara's abduc-
tion). A miracle occurred and baby
Yitzchak was the very image of his
father Avraham, until the scoffers pro-
claimed, "Avraham sired Yitzchak".

SDT Earlier, the Torah tells us of the
generations of Yishmael b. Avraham.
That seems to be in balance with the
beginning of this sedra, which speaks
of Yitzchak, except: [1] the Torah makes
a point that Yishmael is the son of
Hagar the Egyptian, the maidservant of
Sara. In other words, Yishmael was NOT
the real To-l'dot of Avraham; and [2]
To-l'dot (in the Yishmael context) is
spelled without VAVs, implying that
something was missing. To-l'dot of
Yitzchak b. Avraham; it was Avraham
who fathered Yitzchak. And the word
To-l'dot is spelled with its VAV.

Concerning the spelling of TOL'DOT - The word occurs 12 times in Tanach. For Yishmael, the word is without any VAVs - תלדות. With a first VAV, תולדות, it occurs 7 times: Adam, No'ach, B'nei No'ach, Sheim, Terach, Yitzchak, and Aharon & Moshe. This one seems to be the "regular" spelling, since the CHOLOM-TAV plural is usually without a VAV in the Torah (i.e. with a CHOLOM CHASEIR). With a second VAV, תולדות, it is used for Yaakov and Eisav. And with both VAVs, תולדות, it is used for HASHAMAYIM V'HAARETZ (the Heavens and the Earth) and for Peretz (in Megilat Ruth). Now you have the whole picture. And the answer to a TTriddle, if you are paying attention.

Well, not quite. Let's talk about pronunciation. We go out of our way to write TO-L'DOT because of how common it is in the yeshiva world and among Anglos, to mispronounce the name of this week's sedra, twice. First, the word should be accented on the last syllable, not on the next-to-the-last syllable as is very common in certain circles. This mis-accenting is very common with people's names as well as the names of the sedras. Israelis and S'faradim don't have this problem. The Moshes they know, they call mo-SHEH. We (the aforementioned Anglos) say MO-sheh. And so on. Last week's sedra was cha-YEI sa-RA, not CHAyei SA-ra, as we would say.

Which syllable to accent aside, the other problem with the pronunciation of this week's sedra is the SH'VA under the LAMED. Most common mispronunciation is TOL-dot (or TOL-dos).

That treats the SH'VA as a syllable-closing SH'VA NACH - which it is not. Rather, the first syllable is TO. The LAMED has a SH'VA NA under it and it attaches itself to the DOT syllable. So the two syllables are TO and L'DOT, which is why we often write it the way we do. sho-F'TIM is the other sedra so plagued. The wrong syllable accented goes for a majority of the sedras. BO and TZAV we get right. But not Mikeitz of B'shalach... and most of them.

It isn't the end of the world to day TOL-dot; it's just not correct.

Yitzchak is 40 years old when he marries Rivka (3 years after the Akeida). The Torah emphasizes Rivka's family background.

Safe to say that most of us learned from way back that Rivka was 3 years old when she married Yitzchak. This notion is based on the Torah's telling us of the birth of Rivka right after the portion of the Akeida. Yitzchak was 37 at the time of the Akeida and the death of Sara lmeinu. He married at 40, hence Rivka was 3 at the time.

However, Chizkuni (an early commentary of Torah and of Rashi) argues that if Rivka was only 3, there would be a discrepancy in the chronology of the rest of her life. We have sources that indicate she was 133 at the time of her death. Working backwards with various events, we find that she was 14 when she married Yitzchak. The account of Nachor's family - including Rivka, does not necessarily mean that she was just

born at the time of the Akeida. The Torah is just introducing us to Rivka in order to bring her into the picture, so to speak, as Yitzchak is about to take over the mantle of Patriarchhood from Avraham Avinu.

After 20 years of childlessness (10 until Rivka was of child-bearing age - based on the 3 year old opinion - plus an additional 10 years without a child), Yitzchak and Rivka pray to G-d. G-d hears their (actually his) prayer and Rivka becomes pregnant. She is having a "rough time" and goes to Shem b. No'ach (who outlived Avraham, by the way) who tells her G-d's message, that she will give birth to twins who will go in very different ways and become great adversarial nations.

SDT Commentaries say that Rivka was unaware that she was carrying twins; she thought the turmoil within her existed in a single baby - THIS had her very upset; she was somewhat calmed by the Divine message of her carrying twins. Another commentator suggests that Rivka knew she'd have twins but did not see the benefit of bringing a Yaakov into this world if it meant also having an Eisav. Part of the reply to her question "why do I need this?" is that her conclusion was wrong.

Take a look at Rashi. Two great nations - these are Antoninus and Rabbi (Yehuda HaNasi)... It can be suggested that the Divine message to Rivka, was that even though there will be great tension and friction between the descendants of the twins she was carrying, Yaakov and Eisav, there will be an example of a

Roman (from Eisav) and a Jew who will truly get along and that is the hope for the future when the nations of the world will all recognize Israel's role in the world and their special relationship with the One G-d Who will then be universally recognized.

Eisav and Yaakov are born, Yaakov clutching the heel of Eisav. The boys grow and develop different personalities - Eisav is the hunter and outdoorsman; Yaakov, the mild, studious "tent-dweller". Yitzchak loves Eisav; Rivka loves Yaakov.

SDT There are many different commentaries on these relationships. Note that Yitzchak's love is based on Eisav's providing food for him (or deceiving him - based on various drashot). Rivka's love is unconditional. Pirkei Avot says that only an unconditional love will endure forever.

Yaakov is preparing a lentil stew for his father. (The Gemara tell us that this was the day that Avraham died; Yaakov was preparing a traditional mourner's meal for Yitzchak.)

Eisav returns from the field in a state of exhaustion. He asks Yaakov for some of the food. In exchange for the food, Yaakov acquires the birthright, which is insignificant in Eisav's eyes, but meaningful to Yaakov.

[P> 26:1 (33)] A famine hits the Land (like the one in Avraham's time - this is one of the many similarities between the lives of Avraham & Yitzchak) and Yitzchak goes to Avimelech in Gerar.

G-d appears to Yitzchak and reminds him that he must not leave the Land. G-d also repeats his promises of the Land and of the large nation that will descend from him.

Levi - Second Aliya 7 p'sukim - 26:6-12

Yitzchak dwells in Gerar.

This is one of the three-word p'sukim in the Torah. There are 13 or so such p'sukim, and they are occasionally a focus of attention.

Yitzchak and Rivka pose as brother and sister (as did Avraham and Sara, and for the same two reasons). After a while, Avimelech discovers that they are actually husband and wife and complains to Yitzchak about the deception. Avimelech orders his people to leave Yitzchak and Rivka alone. Yitzchak and family flourish in Gerar and G-d blesses them.

SDT In last week's TT we referred to the dispute as to whether Sara and Avraham had a daughter or not. S'fat Emet suggests that something in this week's sedra seems to say that they had a daughter. Yitzchak and Rivka "pose" as brother and sister. Avraham was well-known. Especially to the people and king of Gerar. He would know if Avraham had a daughter or not. Since Avimelech seems to have accepted Yitzchak and Rivka as brother and sister, until he discovered otherwise, it seems reasonable to support the opinion that Avraham (and Sara) were indeed blessed with a daughter.

Shlishi - Third Aliya 10 p'sukim - 26:13-22

Yitzchak thrives in Gerar, which creates jealousy among the locals who fill in the wells that Yitzchak has dug. (There is great symbolism in the Torah's account of the wells, their names, their failures, and then their successes.) Yitzchak is driven away from Gerar. A new well that Yitzchak digs (Eisek) is taken over by the shepherds of Gerar, as is yet another well (Sitna). Only the third well (Rehovot) permits Yitzchak to live in relative peace.

Some see this as a hidden reference to the 1st and 2nd Beit HaMikdash, which fell, and the 3rd which will stand forever. May we see it soon in our time.

SDT Brachot 56: Rabbi Chanina said, he who sees a well in a dream, he will see peace... Yitzchak's servants dug and found a live spring, B'EIR MAYIM CHAYIM. This is immediately followed by the peace treaty between Avimelech and Yitzchak. Rabbi Natan continues in the same Gemara. He who sees a well in his dream has found Torah, as it says in Mishlei: He who finds Me, finds life... an equation is made between G-d, Torah, and Life.

R' Yehoshua b. Levi adds that one should verbalize the words B'eir Mayim Chayim before he encounters the words from Yirmiyahu 6:7 - K'HAKIR BIYA MEIMEHA... "As a well keeps its water fresh, so she keeps fresh her wickedness; violence and destruction,

grief and wounds..." Verbalizing a dream's interpretation is considered significant; an unexpressed dream is often open to opposite meanings and what is expressed first gives the dream its substance and direction. This is the tip of the iceberg of Dream Interpretation as presented by the Torah T'mima. Don't read too much into the comment here - it is meant only as a brief comment.

R'vi'i - Fourth Aliya 7 p'sukim - 26:23-29

Yitzchak sets himself up in Be'er Sheva. G-d appears to him and reiterates the promises for prosperity made to Avraham. Yitzchak builds an altar to G-d and continues to prosper. Avimelech, realizing that his own prosperity was due to the presence of Yitzchak, comes with a delegation to Yitzchak in order to enter into a covenant with him.

Not a rare experience through the generations - Jews expelled from a country, which subsequently regrets its actions because of the decline they experienced without them. And we, somehow, kept going back.

Chamishi 5th Aliya 33 p'sukim - 26:30-27:27

Yitzchak and Avimelech partake of a meal and exchange oaths. Be'er Sheva is reaffirmed as "the city of the Avot" by Yitzchak's actions. Another example of the similarity between Yitzchak's

life and Avraham's.

[S> 26:34 (2)] Eisav marries at 40 years of age - a (sub)conscious attempt to emulate his father. However wicked Eisav is, he is genuinely respectful and loving of his father. On the other hand, Eisav's choice of a wife disgusts both Yitzchak and Rivka.

[S> 27:1 (55)] Yitzchak is old and blind and calls Eisav to prepare for him a special meal and then receive a special blessing. While Eisav is in the fields doing his father's bidding, Rivka prepares Yaakov to receive the blessing instead of Eisav. She tells Yaakov to bring her two goats and she will prepare the dishes that Yitzchak loves. Yaakov hesitates for fear that Yitzchak will feel his smooth skin and realize that Yaakov has come to deceive him. Rivka dresses Yaakov in Eisav's garments and places a goat-skin on his neck to give it a rough feel. She gives Yaakov the food to bring to his father.

It seems obvious that Yaakov was punished measure for measure for his deception of Yitzchak. The Brothers not only deceived Yaakov concerning the fate of Yosef, but they used a goat and a garment (exactly the two items that Yaakov used to deceive his father) to bring about their deception. If we accept the idea that Yaakov was supposed to get the bracha that Yitzchak thought he was going to give to Eisav, that it was G-d's will, and even G-d's command, according to Onkeles, to Rivka to "set it up", then why was

Yaakov punished so severely?

An answer might be suggested in the form of an analogy. When one has to take drastic, life-saving treatments - "serious" medication, radiation, etc., what is done might be absolutely necessary, but there are often harsh side-effects.

Continuing the analogy, was there not a "safer" way for Yaakov to get the b'racha? Apparently not. If there is a medication that is effective and without serious side effects, why would a person take the medicine that has serious side effects? For whatever reason(s), the way it went is how it was meant to go.

SDT When the Torah tells us that Yaakov gave his father wine to drink, the TROP note under the word LO (to him) is a MEIRCHA CH'FULA, double meircha. This rare note, suggests the Meshech Chochma, reminds us of the proper way to drink a cup of wine - not gulping it down in one shot, but rather finishing it in two "installments".

Shishi - Sixth Aliya 23 p'sukim - 27:28-28:4

The blessing invoked by Yitzchak upon Yaakov, for bountiful produce and respected status among nations, has been borrowed by us to be recited on Motza'ei Shabbat -

V'YITEN L'CHA HA-ELOKIM... 'May G-d grant you the dew of heaven and the fat of the earth, much grain and wine. Nations will serve you;

governments will bow down to you. You shall be like a lord over your brother; your mother's children will prostrate themselves to you. Those who curse you are cursed, and those who bless you are blessed.'

As Yitzchak finishes blessing Yaakov, Eisav returns from the hunt. He prepares food for his father and presents it with a request (demand) of the blessing. Yitzchak trembles greatly when he realizes that the bracha went to Yaakov. When Yitzchak explains to Eisav that Yaakov received (rightly so) the blessing, Eisav bitterly cries out and asks his father for a blessing too. Yitzchak gives Eisav a blessing (not as exalted as Yaakov's). Eisav plans to kill Yaakov for this, the second time he has taken something away from him. Rivka hears (how? Ru'ach HaKodesh, perhaps?) of Eisav's plans and encourages Yaakov to flee to Rivka's hometown until Eisav's wrath subsides. Rivka suggests to Yitzchak that he send Yaakov away to find a proper wife.

Note that Rivka did NOT tell Yitzchak that Eisav wanted to kill Yaakov. Perhaps she felt that it would pain him too much to learn of Eisav's true character. Perhaps, Yitzchak would have refused to believe that his Eisav would contemplate such a thing. Instead, Rivka expresses another (legitimate) concern as her reason for wanting Yitzchak to send Yaakov away.

Yitzchak calls for Yaakov and blesses

him again and sends him off to Padan Aram to find a wife from Rivka's family. He gives Yaakov "the blessing of Avraham", thus providing for the continuity of what becomes The Jewish People.

Sh'VII Seventh Aliya 5 p'sukim - 28:5-9

Yitzchak sends Yaakov off to Padan Aram to Lavan b. B'tu'el, the brother of Rivka who is the mother of Yaakov and Eisav. (Unusual ID.) Eisav sees that their father has sent Yaakov to find a wife, because he does not want him to take a Canaanite wife. Yaakov goes on his way and Eisav takes as another wife, the daughter of Yishmael, Machalat b. Yishmael..

Talmud Yerushalmi exclaims that this is Bas'mat, and asks why her name was changed. The astonishing answer is that all Eisav's sins were forgiven when he took a wife intended to please his parents. The Talmud generalizes and gives this as the source that the sins of a CHATAN (and KALLA) are forgiven when they marry. Strange source for a significant concept.

Haftara 21 p'sukim Mal-achi 1:1-2:7

There is speculation as to whether Mal'achi is the name of an individual, or a description of "My messenger". Some say that Mal'achi was Ezra. Mal'achi is known as the last of the

prophets. Mal'achi brings G-d's message to the people that He loves Yaakov (and his descendants), and hates Eisav, even though Yaakov and Eisav are brothers. Thus, the Haftara echoes the rivalry and relationship between the two brothers that is the substance of the sedra Toldot. The haftara refers to the respect a son has for his father. In this regard, Eisav was exemplary.

Mal'achi criticizes the kohanim of the time for not being careful in the offering of korbanot. We can see this as a preparation for the building of the new Beit HaMikdash in the hopes that it will function properly and be a true honor to G-d.

PROBING the PROPHETS

The precise identity of the last prophet in Trei Asar, the navi Malachi, is shrouded in mystery, with the G'mara in Megilla (15a) quoting various opinions, including those identifying him as Ezra or Mordechai. Most scholars, however, agree with the majority opinion of the Rabbis that Malachi was a separate and distinct individual who prophesied during the period of Bayit Sheni. And, although the exact time of his activities is also in question, most contend that Malachi was the last of the biblical nevi'im, so that his prophecies remain the last words of G-d delivered to the nation of Israel. As such, it is interesting to analyze this week's haftara, the first perek in Sefer Malachi, and find messages directed to the navi's

contemporaries but also meaningful for the future exiled generations who would, after all, lack the prophetic connection to Hashem that the people had throughout biblical times.

Much of the haftara focuses upon the Kohanim who attended Hashem in Bayit Sheni. The Second Temple had already been built and was fully functioning, once again making Yerushalayim the center of worship for the Jewish nation. The Beit HaMikdash that Hashem had described as the place He chose L'SHAKEIN SH'MO SHAM, as the dwelling place of His NAME, was serving all of Israel once more. Likewise, the kohanim, had returned to their rightful post as servants of Hashem in the Beit HaMikdash. But rather than sanctify the "name" of G-d that dwelled there, the kohanim are accused of being "bozei sh'mi" those who scorned and defamed His holy name.

But what has this to do with our parsha? The navi Malachi begins his words by stating that Hashem had chosen Ya'akov over Eisav, much as Yitzchak chose to confer the bracha of Avraham (birkat Avraham) on Ya'akov and not on his eldest, Eisav. Hashem's choice of Ya'akov, the navi states, was based upon the fact that he hated Eisav ("v'et Eisav saneiti") and as a result, the land of Edom was doomed to destruction. However, Malachi emphasized that Hashem's anger at Edom would not automatically provide Israel with redemption. It is essential that the Jews earn G-d's favor by properly worshipping Him as He commanded them to. The corruption of the sacrificial rite that ran rampant at the time is the focus of the

prophet's harsh words against the Kohanim for their encouragement of the belief that perfunctory ritual in the Beit HaMikdash is all that was necessary. Their practice of offering sickly animals as sacrifices while saving the healthy ones for themselves was abhorrent to G-d.

Malachi paints the picture of what the Kohanim should be: they must be more than ritual functionaries; they must be teachers and arbiters. They must be the ones to spread the knowledge of Torah and, through that understanding, the knowledge of Hashem. The prophet's message closes with the reminder that the tribe of Levi had a special covenant with G-d and, over the generations, they turned people away from sin. It is THIS that Hashem demands of the Kohanim. And it is this that Hashem demands of Israel.

Israel must earn the favor of G-d and not take for granted that, due to His anger at Eisav He will embrace Israel. This last prophet of Israel prepares the nation for the long galut that would follow by reminding them that it will not be the sacrificial rite that will preserve them in the Diaspora, but the Torah taught by the Kohanim who, when doing their job, fulfill their responsibility as agents of Hashem.

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