

Bo

15th of 54 sedras; 3rd of 11 in Sh'mot

Written on 205.67 lines in a Torah, 24th

14 parshiot; 8 open, 6 closed

106 p'sukim - rank: 29 (7th in Shmot)
tied with Toldot & Vayigash; but larger
than each, otherwise

1655 words - ranks 21st (5th in Shmot)

6149 letters - ranks 20th (6th in Shmot)

Rise in rankings results from BO's
p'sukim being much longer than
average for the Torah (longest in
Sh'mot).

MITZVOT

20 mitzvot; 9 pos, 11 prohibitions

This ends an 18-sedra run (1/3 of the
sedras) of hardly any mitzvot. Last four
sedras of D'varim, all of B'reishit (12
sedras), Sh'mot & Va'eira have a total of
5 mitzvot (.8%). The other 36 sedras
(2/3 of the Torah) have the other 608!
(99.2%)



[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.

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 11 p'sukim - 10:1-11

[P> 10:1 (11)] G-d once again
(previously with Frogs and Dever)
sends Moshe to Par'o (in his palace) to
warn about the Locust.

SDT The signature of this week's
sedra - BO EL PAR'O is a phrase that
occurs three times, each time as an
introduction to one of the Plagues.
Specifically, G-d said to Moshe to "come
before Par'o" for the middle plague of
each 3-plague set - FROGS, DEVER
(animal disease), and LOCUST. Baal Ha-
Turim points out that when G-d sends
Moshe to the royal palace, He uses the
term BO. When He sends him to the
river to find Par'o there, He uses the
term LEICH.

This time, however, it is with the
additional statement that G-d has
hardened Par'o's heart so that His
wonders will be evident to all, and that
all will know Him. Moshe and Aharon
warn Par'o of the potential devastation
(the description of which is noticeably
longer than for other plagues). Par'o's
servants (advisors?) pressure Par'o
into agreeing to release the People.
Par'o offers Moshe the adults. Moshe's
reply (something which becomes a
Jewish hallmark for the ages - pun

intended) is that our religious experiences must include ALL Jews, young and old. (Judaism places a premium on Chinuch and on the transmission of knowledge and values from one generation to the next.) Par'o rejects this and chases Moshe and Aharon from his presence.

Locust were sent by G-d to punish Egypt by devouring the produce of the land. This was "measure for measure" punishment for the excessive field and planting work that Par'o imposed on the People of Israel in order to demoralize them and to prevent them from having a normal family life.

Commentaries point out that Par'o and the Egyptians continually over-did their oppression and enslavement of the Jews. Even if we were to suggest that punishment is unfair to those who were acting according to G-d's wishes, so to speak, and carrying out His Plan, it is for the excesses that they are being held strictly accountable. "Yes, I told you to rough them up, but I never said anything about beating them so mercilessly." (This does not mean to suggest that people who "play a part in G-d's plans" are not held accountable for their "regular" actions. They are. But there is special emphasis on the excesses. Having the people slave at making bricks is one thing. Withholding straw for the purpose is excessively cruel. For example.)

On the other hand, the excessive cruelty of the Egyptians is partially

responsible, so to speak, for G-d's switching to His Midat HaRachamim in judging the people, from the Midat HaDin which might have kept us in Egypt longer. The original prophecy to Avraham Avinu called for 400 years. Actual time spent in Egypt (not even in slavery) was "only" 210 years. The inclusion of the years from Yitzchak's birth is (can be seen as) G-d's reaction (so to speak) to the excessive harshness of the Egyptian experience.

Levi - Second Aliya 12 p'sukim - 10:12-23

[S> 10:12 (9)] G-d tells Moshe to raise his hands over the land. Moshe raises his staff (notice: his staff, not his hands - why?) and the locust come. So overwhelming is this plague, that Par'o "hurries" to call for Moshe and Aharon, admits to them that he has sinned, and asks them to pray for the removal of this terrible plague. Moshe does so, and a "reverse" wind causes the locust to totally disappear. G-d once again hardens Par'o's heart.

[P> 10:21 (9)] Plague #9 - Darkness (just like #3 Lice and #6 Boils) is brought sans-warning.

The thrice-repeated pattern is (1) find Par'o at the Nile and deliver the warning, (2) go to his palace and bring the warning "closer to home", and (3) twice-warned is sufficient; he won't let the People go, bring the next plague without additional warning. Additionally, there is an escalation in severity

from the first to the second to the third plague in each set of 3 plagues. The 10th plague stands alone: Par'o was warned of it "up front" and it is mentioned more than once as the "ultimate" punishment for Egypt.

Darkness, an unusual, unnatural, tangible darkness (not merely the absence of light), descends upon the Egyptians for a paralyzing 3 days (Rashi says that it was for 6 days). In the Jewish neighborhoods, there is light.

Let's define "natural" darkness as the absence of light. Consistent with the other Makot, the plague of Darkness was not natural. Some of the unnatural qualities of the Darkness of Egypt were that it was substantive, and that lighting a fire would not dispel it. This was a supernatural darkness. Perhaps, a darkness like pre-Creation darkness (B'reishit 1:2). Along these lines (but different) is an explanation attributed to the Vilna Gaon. Darkness, as well as Light, is a creation; it is not just the absence of light. One of the laws of nature that G-d created is that light dispels darkness. During Choshech, nature was turned upside-down - darkness dispelled light.

SDT "Man did not see his fellow, nor did a person rise from his place..." Chidushei HaRim writes that this is a description of the worse kind of darkness in human life, when a person does not see the suffering of his fellow. Not only does he not extend his hand to help the other, but the ultimate result is the inability of the individual to even help himself. The People of Israel

had light throughout their dwellings. May we always be able to see the plight of our fellow Jews and respond with acts of Chesed worthy of our Heritage.

Shlishi - Third Aliya 9 p'sukim - 10:24-11:3

Par'o calls for Moshe and tells him to go, even with the children, but to leave the livestock behind. Moshe insists that ALL will leave.

Par'o once again refuses, and this time he threatens death (he had Moshe's in mind - G-d "applied it" differently) if he sees Moshe again. He thus inadvertently prophesies his own death. This is part of the "topsy turvy" aspects of the Exodus.

[P> 11:1 (3)] G-d "reminds" Moshe that there is one more plague (the "real" one; the one that was presented up front, the one mentioned before all of the others) and then Par'o will send the people on their way.

G-d tells Moshe to tell the people to "borrow" (or ask for) things from their neighbors. He says that the Egyptians will miraculously feel kindly towards the Jews (even though the Jews are responsible, in the eyes of the Egyptians, for their recent suffering). G-d even implanted in the eyes of the Egyptians an admiration and respect for Moshe.

Rashi points out the unusual way that G-d instructs Moshe to talk to the people. He says, "please". DABER-NA.

Rashi explains that G-d did not want Avraham Avinu to "complain" that the oppression prophesied should come true, but not the promise of leaving Egypt with great wealth. Hence, Moshe, please speak to the people and have them take... Targum Onkeles, on the other hand, translates NA as NOW (not as please).

R'vi'i - Fourth Aliya 27 p'sukim - 11:4-12:20

[S> 11:4 (5)] Moshe says, in G-d's name, that He (G-d) will kill ALL Egyptian firstborns, that the screaming from the deaths will be unprecedented, and that in total contrast, utter tranquility will reign in the Jewish area.

[S> 11:9 (2)] G-d says that Par'o will once again refuse even this threat, so that the full course of wonders and miracles will benefit the People of Israel.

SDT One commentator says that Moshe was distraught by the extent to which Par'o went in his refusal to let the People go. Such dedication to wickedness in the face of such devastating punishment was truly disheartening to Moshe. How can the power of evil be so strong? How can someone fight against it and hope to win? G-d's answer was that it was He Who hardened and strengthened Par'o's heart. Left on his own, Par'o would have given in long before. Theoretically, G-d could do this to punish us, but in this case it was for our benefit.

SDT The Sfas Emes marvels at the fact that only G-d would give the power

to a wicked person to oppose Him. Why would G-d give Par'o the ability to defy Him? In order to bring about the marvels and wonders of the Exodus, so that the People of Israel shall know beyond doubt that G-d has taken them out of Egypt.

[S> 12:1 (20)] G-d commands the setting up of the Jewish calendar [4,A153 12:2] (even before we left Egypt).

He then commands the taking of a lamb or goat for each household (or so). The animal was to be taken on the 10th of Nissan (this rule was for "Pesach Mitzrayim" only, and not for future Pesachs; therefore it is not counted among the mitzvot of the Torah) and held for the 14th of the month, when it was to be slaughtered in the afternoon [5, A55 12:6]. Its blood was to be smeared on the doorposts and lintel (only that first Pesach). The sacrifice is to be eaten on the night of the 15th of Nissan [6, A56 12:8], having been roasted, eaten with matza and maror (this being part of the mitzva "for the generations", but not counted separately among Taryag); that is, neither cooked nor partially done [7, L125 12:9], but roasted whole. No part was to be left over until morning [8, L117 12:10]; any leftovers were to be burned [143,A91 this mitzva is counted in Parshat Tzav, not in Bo, but 12:10 is used to add the Korban Pesach's NOTAR to the positive command in Tzav which textually addresses the leftovers of

a differ- ent sacrifice]. It was to be eaten with "belt tied", in haste, ready to leave (these details are for Egyptian Pesach only).

MitzvaWatch

Korban Pesach is an example of a piece of text in the Torah that mixes episode with mitzva. Much more often, we find either/or. It is a bit confusing to distinguish between the details of the mitzva of KP for all generations and those elements of the story of the Exodus which were meant only for that first Pesach. In fact, it is not just confusing; it is impossible to accurately differentiate between the two categories of details... WITHOUT the Oral Law. The Talmud informs us as to what constitutes the mitzva of KP. The Written Word is not complete. Our Torah consists of two inseparable parts - the Written Word and the Oral Law (embodied in the Talmud and other sources). This is a fact that is reinforced over and over again throughout the Torah. If one attempts to understand the Written Word without the Oral Law and Tradition, there will be confusion at best and distortion and perversion of G-d's Word, at worst.

Then G-d will "pass through" Egypt on that night, kill the firstborns, and "pass-over" the Jewish home with the blood-marks. This shall become a holiday for all generations. Matzot are to be eaten for seven days and on Erev Pesach, Chametz is to be eliminated from our homes [9, A156 12:15].

(Intentionally and spitefully eating Chametz on Pesach is a rejection of membership in Klal Yisrael, hence the punishment of "excision".)

The basis of Yom Tov is set down in 12:16 - specifically that Melacha is prohibited, as on Shabbat, except for "that which is needed for food".

The source of "sh'mura" matza is in 12:17. The mitzva of eating matza on seder night [10, A158 12:18] is followed by the prohibition of owning of chametz during all of Pesach [11, L200 12:19]. Foods containing chametz are forbidden [12, L198 12:20].

MitzvaWatch

Because the prohibition of chametz and the mitzva of matza are linked to each other in the same pasuk, we do not view Matza as a purely positive time-related mitzva. Hence, women are not exempt. In fact, women are obligated to perform other Seder mitzvot as a package deal with matza. Specifically, women are obligated on the mitzva of Hagada - they should not be silent observers at the Seder, but should participate in transmission of the story and details to their children and guests. Women are also obligated (for a different reason) to drink four cups of wine, which is a Rabbinic command.

Chamishi 5th Aliya
8 p'sukim - 12:21-28

[P> 12:21 (8)] Moshe gathers the elders of the People and relays G-d's instructions. He also tells them that when the People get to Eretz Yisrael, they will continue to commemorate the events of the Exodus, with questions and answers from one generation to the next. The People do as commanded.

Moshe tells the people that which G-d had previously commanded him to tell them. Here it says: Take a bundle of hyssop (כַּזָּיִת, guess what it is called in Arabic - the word we use in Hebrew - ZAHTAR), dip it in the blood of the Korban Pesach, and daub it on the lintel and the two doorposts.

Notice: Not only is going into Eretz Yisrael part of the Promises of Redemption, but in the laws of Korban Pesach there is reference to "when you will come to the Land..."

SDT The Torah tells us that when G-d will pass through Egypt smiting their firstborns, and He will see blood on the doorposts and lintels of the Jewish homes, He will not let the "Destructive Force" (MAL'ACH HAMAVET, Angel of Death) to come to your homes... What was the MASHCHIT doing in Egypt on that night, when the Hagada states that it was G-d Himself who smote the Egyptian firstborns? Some explain that the MASHCHIT was in charge, so to speak, of "regularly scheduled deaths". G-d did not allow him to enter a Jewish home that night so the contrast with Egypt would be total. Meaning that

those who were "scheduled" to die that night were given an extension in order to highlight the contrast between Egypt and Israel.

Shishi - Sixth Aliya 23 p'sukim - 12:29-51

[S> 12:29 (8)] It comes to pass at exactly midnight that the Egyptian firstborns are smitten, and that the Egyptians shower the Jews with gifts, and hurry them on their way.

[P> 12:37 (6)] And so the People of Israel leave Egypt. The People leave in such haste that they take quick-baked breads with them without taking the time to let the dough rise. Approx. 600,000 men, plus women and children leave Egypt, together with many Egyptians who are smart enough to flee with them. Thus ends a 430 year period of exile (according to some opinions, this is the time from the B'rit bein HaB'tarim to the Exodus - this is another way of explaining when the "enslavement began"). That night shall be a special night for all of Israel through the generations.

[P> 12:43 (8)] The Torah now shifts from relating the story of the Exodus back to the rules for the Korban Pesach. Jews who have "left Judaism" and embraced another religion [13, L128 12:43], non-Jews, even those who are committed to the Seven Noahide Laws [14, L126 12:45] may not eat Korban Pesach. The Korban must be

eaten in one place; removing it from its place is forbidden [15, L123 12:46], as is breaking a bone in it [16,L121 12:46]. Only Jews participate. An uncircumcised Jew may not eat of the KP [17,L127 12:48]. A true convert to Judaism is equal to a born-Jew. The People did as commanded.

[S> 12:51 (1)] On this very day, the multitude left Egypt.

Sh'VII Seventh Aliya 16 p'sukim - 13:1-16

[P> 13:1 (10)] As a commemoration of the Exodus (specifically plague #10), we are to sanctify firstborns (human, kosher farm animals, and donkey. Each type of "b'chor" is treated differently) [18,A79 13:2]. The Torah sets down the yearly observance of Pesach, even after entry into Israel.

Chametz may not be eaten [19, L197 13:3] nor even owned [20, L201 13:7] on Pesach. It is a mitzva to relate the story of what happened [21,A157 13:8] at the Seder. T'filin also serve as a reminder of the Exodus. Pesach must be in the spring, the time of renewal of nature.

[P> 13:11 (6)] A firstborn-male donkey must be redeemed [22,A81 13:13] (by giving a sheep or its value to a kohen) or destroyed (if the owner refuses to redeem it [23,A82 13:13] (not preferred).

The Torah reiterates the significance

of the younger generation asking and receiving answers about the origin of the Nation. The T'filin angle is also repeated.

The two final portions of BO (all of Sh'vii) join the two first portions of the Sh'ma as the four passages of the Torah contained in each of the two T'filin (written together on a single strip of parchment in the "shel yad" and on four separate parchments inserted into four distinct chambers in the "shel rosh").

Haftara 16 p'sukim Yirmiyahu 46:13-28

Parallel to the sedra, Egypt's downfall (at the hands of Bavel) is prophesied. (It is rare that a prophecy to another nation is used as a Haftara.) Israel, however, shall not fear; G-d is with us! The pasuk that assures us about the Ultimate Redemption mentions that it might happen in the distant future. Nonetheless, we shall not despair. This can be seen in context of the well-known notion that Mashiach will either come in his appointed time, or sooner. Depends on us.

The Babylonian army is compared with the countless nature of swarms of locust. Thus Egypt falls to locust again - and there is another connection to the sedra.

PROBING the PROPHETS

The two prophets, Yirmiyahu and Yechezkel, were contemporaries,

active before and after the destruction of Bayit Rishon. Although living at the same time they did not live in the same place. Yirmiyahu lived in Eretz Yisrael, while the younger Yechezkel dwelled in the land of the Diaspora, Bavel. However, both lived through great historical events, some of which they witnessed themselves. For this reason, we read Yechezkel's prophecy of Egypt's impending destruction brought on by the Babylonian invasion of their land as last week's haftara and Yirmiyahu's nevu'a regarding the same event for this week's haftara.

When studying the two prophecies, one might be tempted to assume that they are almost interchangeable and that either one could have been chosen as the prophetic reading to accompany either of the two Parshiot, Va'eira or Bo. But that is not so. For, although the two nevi'im describe the same historical event, i.e., the imminent collapse of the great Egyptian empire, and although they both detail its destruction, they do not focus on the exact same thing. In last week's haftarah, Yechezkel's message described the physical ruin that would come to the land of Egypt. He describes the "fate" that would befall the land itself saying that the land would become "destroyed and waste", warning that neither the "foot of Man nor that of a beast" would pass through the land. He continues his message by predicting that Egypt would become the most desolate of all places and its cities would remain in ruins for forty years. The choice of this prophecy to serve as the haftarah for the parasha of Va'era therefore, is

quite fitting for these descriptions correspond well to the condition of the land in Moshe's time after the plagues were visited upon Egypt, something which is described in the parsha itself.

This week's message, in contrast, centers about the crumbling power of the once-all-powerful Egyptian empire. Yirmiyahu turns his attention to the humiliating defeat of Par'oh's military which, he predicts, will flee from the enemy in such panic that the fighters will stumble over each other in their attempt to escape. Here too, we can suggest a possible connection to our parasha that Chazal saw, convincing them to establish this 49th perek in Sefer Yirmiyahu as a fitting haftarah for parashat Bo. Besides comparing the number of Babylonian soldiers arrayed against Egypt as being as numerous as locust, the very plague that opens this week's Torah reading, the description of the collapse of Egyptian power parallels the story in the parasha where the culmination of Hashem's punishments led to the surrender of Par'oh to G-d's commands. For the first time, Egypt's great power is challenged and defeated as the Egyptian slave labor overcomes the empire's military might and begins the eventual weakening of the Egyptian state.

And, finally, the closing verses of the selection, psukim that predict the return of Israel to her land and the guarantee of their survival despite difficult challenges, remind us that the parasha also includes Israel's exodus from Egypt and the start of the peoples' journey of return to the land of their ancestors.

In summation, we need to better study our past in order to get a glimpse of our future. Often, our haftarah readings echo events of the past; often, they point to our yet-to-be future.

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