

VAYEISHEV

9th of 54 sedras;
9th of 12 in B'reishit



Written on 190 lines, ranks 28th

4 Parshiyot; 3 open, 1 closed

112 p'sukim - ranks 24th (8th)

tied with Matot; more words & letters
than Matot, same line count

1558 words - ranks 24th (8th) tied with
Vayakhel; fewer p'sukim & letters than
it. Vayakhel is 20 lines longer

5972 letters - ranks 24th (8th) tied with
D'varim; more p'sukim & words than it,
but fewer lines

MITZVOT

No mitzvot are counted from Vayeshev

Aliya-by-Aliya Sedra Summary

[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.

And it's also
Shabbat Chanuka
see further

Kohen - First Aliya 11 p'sukim - 37:1-11

[P> 37:1 (36)] Yaakov has spent years
away from home and now has
returned. The Torah indicates that it is
through Yosef that Yaakov's legacy
continues.

17 year old Yosef brings bad reports
about his brothers to Yaakov. Yaakov
loves Yosef above his brothers and
gives him a special (striped, colorful)
coat. As a result, the brothers hate
Yosef and cannot talk civilly to him.
Yosef's two dreams (and especially, his
telling his brothers about them)
increases their hatred and jealousy,
and this alarms Yaakov.

SDT: These are the TO-L'DOT of
Yaakov: Yosef... Should not the Torah
have started with Reuven? This comes
to show us, says the Gemara, that Yosef
should have been Yaakov's firstborn,
but G-d's mercy for Leah put her before
Rachel in giving birth.

The first dream was of his brother's
sheaves of wheat bowing to his sheaf.
Yosef's second dream, of the Sun,
Moon, and stars bowing to him, added
fuel to his brothers' hatred. Yaakov
pointed out the absurdity of the
dream, since Rachel, the Moon, had
already died and would therefore not
be bowing to Yosef.

Rashi says 2 different things:

(1) The dream was referring to Bilha who raised Yosef in Rachel's absence; and (2) even "true" dreams have an element of nonsense. These seem to be mutually exclusive statements - if the Moon represents Bilha, then the dream contained no nonsense. Yaakov seems to have purposely voiced the second option in order to diffuse some of the brothers' anger.

SDT: The Gemara, Masechet Shabbat says, in the name of R' Chama b. Guriya in the name of Rav, that a person should never favor one child among his children, because it was a little bit of cloth that aroused jealousy of the brothers for Yosef and that it brought the whole family down to Egypt. Parents and grandparents (aunts and uncles too) have to be very careful not to cause jealousy among siblings to rear its ugly head. This does not necessarily mean identical presents and treatment, but it means thinking carefully and acting wisely.

Levi - Second Aliya 11 p'sukim - 37:12-22

The brothers are tending sheep near Sh'chem. Yaakov sends Yosef to them. A stranger (some say, the angel Gavriel) helps him find them.

In the whole story of Yosef and his brothers, one can see that G-d has a plan which proceeds with the unknow-

ing help of the brothers and other individuals. And yet, each person involved acts of his own free will, and is therefore accountable for his actions.

When the brothers see Yosef coming, they (some say, Shimon and Levi) suggest killing him. Reuven talks them out of it by suggesting that they not spill his blood, but throw him into a pit instead. The Torah testifies that Reuven really intended to save Yosef.

A point must be made about the concluding pasuk of this Aliya, which gives credit to Reuven for saving Yosef. Commentaries say that Reuven could have talked the brothers out of the whole thing; instead, he suggested the snake- and scorpion-infested pit. And, Yosef wasn't saved. Nonetheless, Reuven is credited for his intention to save Yosef.

Rashi says that Reuven truly intended to come back and save Yosef - that's good - but his reason was that he, as oldest, would be blamed for anything that happened to Yosef - not a nice reason. Nonetheless, he gets the credit for the good deed he planned on doing - even though it wasn't accomplished AND even though his motives were not pure.

Imagine our merit for good actions with good intentions with good results.

Shlishi - Third Aliya 14 p'sukim - 37:23-36

When Yosef arrives, the brothers

remove his coat and throw him into a deep pit. The brothers sit to eat. (This is considered a sign of callousness towards their brother and what they have done to him.) When a Ishmaelite caravan approaches, Yehuda suggests that it would be wrong to kill Yosef (Reuven's intentions notwithstanding, the brothers expected Yosef to die in the pit); they should rather get rid of him by selling him into slavery. Through a series of transactions, Yosef ends up in Egypt as a slave to Potifar.

(If that sounded vague, there is good reason - commentaries suggest different scenarios as to who sold Yosef to whom; how many transactions were there; who took Yosef out of the BOR. One thing is sure - Yosef ended up in Egypt.)

When Reuven returns to the scene and discovers Yosef missing, he rends his garment and expresses his distress to the others. The brothers slaughter a goat, smear Yosef's multi-colored, striped coat in its blood, and send it to Yaakov to identify.

SDT: Commentaries point out that just as Yaakov had deceived his father with a goat and a garment (goat & coat), so too was he deceived with a goat and a coat. This is a stark example of "Mida k'neged mida" - measure for measure.

Yaakov is inconsolable. (This is considered an indication that Yaakov subconsciously knew that Yosef was alive; one naturally accepts consola-

tion for the dead after a time, but not for the missing.) Think about the hostages who are still in Gaza.

Because of Yosef's story, Vayeishev is designated each year as SHABBAT SH'VUYEI V'NE'EDAREI TZAHA"L - the Shabbat for Israel's captives and missing.

SDT: Rashi gives us another aspect of the "Measure for Measure" punishment of Yaakov. The pasuk says that he "mourned for his son MANY DAYS". Rashi says that it was 22 years! Yosef was 17 when he was sold. He was 30 when he stood before Par'o. That's 13. Seven years of plenty and the first two years of famine before father and son were reunited. That makes 22 years that Yaakov was without Yosef. This, says Rashi, is the exact length of time that Yaakov was away from Yitzchak. It includes the 20 years with Lavan, a year and a half in Sukkot, and six months in Beit El before Yaakov returned to his father's house. Remember that Yaakov had various good excuses, nonetheless...

R'vi'i - Fourth Aliya 30 p'sukim - 38:1-30

[P> 38:1 (30)] Subsequently, Yehuda leaves home and befriends an Adullamite named CHIRA.

SDT: Why is the story of Yosef interrupted to tell us about Yehuda's situation?

Rashi tells us that Yehuda was no longer looked up to by his brothers. After they saw the terrible effect on Yaakov of the Yosef business, they blamed Yehuda for not talking them out of the whole idea. Hence the term "And Yehuda went down from his brothers" has a double meaning.

There he meets and marries the daughter of Shu'a, who bears him three sons. He marries off his eldest, Er, to Tamar. When Er dies, the next brother Onan, marries his brother's widow, Yibum-style. The Torah tells us that Onan refused to have a child with Tamar, because that child would "belong" (so to speak) to Er. This, G-d took seriously (so to speak) and Onan also dies. Tamar is left to wait for the third son, Shela (for Yibum).

Some time later, Yehuda's wife dies. Yehuda travels to the area where Tamar lives. When she hears of his impending arrival and realizes that she has not been given to Shela yet, she disguises herself. Yehuda, thinking she is a prostitute, sleeps with her. She asks and receives three items as security to guarantee that he will send her payment (a goat). When it becomes known that Tamar is pregnant, Yehuda is summoned. Assuming that she has acted sinfully, he is prepared to have her punished. Tamar produces the three items and announces that she is pregnant by their owner.

Commentaries explain that prior to Matan Torah, any close relative could

take the childless wife of the deceased; after the Torah was given, only a brother qualifies for YIBUM.

Yehuda recognizes that he is the guilty one, not Tamar, and he admits it. She gives birth to twins (one extending his hand first, the other actually being born first). They are named Peretz (ancestor of King David) and Zerach.

Note the repeat of the confused first-born theme. It pervades Sefer B'reishit.

OBSERVATION: Yaakov deceives his father with a garment (Eisav's) and fans the jealousy of his son's against Yosef with the "coat of many colors". He is deceived (and devastated) by that same coat when the brothers bring it back to him all bloodied. Yehuda is "troubled" by his garment which he gave to Tamar as one of the three securities for his promise to pay her with goats. (P'tilim, says Rashi, refers to Yehuda's cloak.) Yosef, the victim (but not completely free of guilt in the matter) has his coat grabbed by Potifar's wife. Yosef leaves it in her hands as he runs from the house; the coat becomes the damning piece of evidence against him.

Chamishi 5th Aliya 6 p'sukim - 39:1-6

[S> 39:1 (23)] In "meanwhile back at the ranch" style, the Torah returns us to the story of Yosef. Yosef serves in Potifar's house and brings success to

his master. He is well-liked by all, and is given much responsibility. Then the Torah makes a point of telling us that Yosef was very handsome.

SOT: The Midrash says that Yosef was aware of his looks and became too comfortable in Potifar's house. Things were going well, he had good food and drink, and he began "curling his hair". G-d (so to speak) said to Yosef: Your father is in agony over your disappearance and supposed demise and you are enjoying yourself? I shall make things rough for you too.

Shishi - Sixth Aliya 17 p'sukim - 39:7-23

Potifar's wife casts her eye upon Yosef. She repeatedly attempts to seduce him. His constant refusal angers her.

She grabs him on a day when no one else is in the house. Yosef flees, leaving his coat behind. (This is the second time his coat has been left in the hands of others!) Potifar's wife denounces Yosef to all who will listen, and Potifar has no choice but to have Yosef tossed into prison.

[Speculation: Potifar likely believed that Yosef was innocent, which would explain why he didn't have Yosef killed, only jailed. There seems to be a source that says that As'nat - Potifar's daughter and Yosef's future wife - told her father that Yosef was innocent. Potifar apparently couldn't let him off

scot-free - his wife would blow a gasket, but he spared his life.]

G-d "favors" Yosef in prison, and Yosef becomes well-liked and respected there too. Even in his troubled circumstances, Yosef is watched over favorably by G-d.

SOT: Commentaries see the episode of Potifar's wife as an appropriate punishment for Yosef:

(a) having been vain about his good looks,

(b) having reported to his father that his brothers had been "lifting their eyes" to the local girls, and

(c) experiencing libelous accusations against himself, as he had reported the "evil-doings" of his brothers to their father. Baal HaTurim adds that Yosef spent 10 years in prison corresponding to the 10 brothers he reported on.

Sh'VII Seventh Aliya 23 p'sukim - 40:1-23

[P> 40:1 (23)] The last portion of Vayeishev tells of the dreams of the Royal Wine Steward and the Royal Baker, both of whom had been imprisoned by Par'o for misdemeanors. Both dream on the same night and awake in morning very agitated. After Yosef interprets the wine steward's dream in a positive manner, the baker asks Yosef to interpret his dream as well. Yosef predicts death for him.

Both dreams come true: the wine steward is restored to his position of honor and the baker is hanged. Yosef asks the wine steward to remember him to Par'o, but he forgets Yosef and his promise to him.

Rashi tells us that Yosef was to spend another two years in prison for relying on the Wine Steward to get him out of prison. This raises the question in our minds of the line between BITACHON, trust in G-d, and HISHTADLUS, effort a person expends to get himself out of a tough situation. Could it not have been viewed that G-d set up the whole dream situation with the Wine Steward and the Baker, so that Yosef would do exactly what he did, and the Wine Steward would then be in a position and willing state of mind to help Yosef and put in the good word to Par'o? Why is Yosef faulted for taking the opportunity to try to get out of prison via the Wine Steward, when one can claim that G-d had sent the Wine Steward to Yosef (so to speak) for exactly that purpose.

It is possible that the spiritual level of Yosef required different behavior than would be reasonable and proper for "the rest of us".

Or... it is possible that under the circumstances, namely that Yosef had just credited G-d repeatedly for his ability to interpret dreams, that the Wine Steward received the "wrong message" from Yosef when Yosef asks him to remember Yosef favorably. Maybe like: "Hey, your G-d can interpret

dreams but can't even get you out of this dump without you asking me for a favor." Maybe there is a Chilul HaShem factor to consider here.

Maftir - 2nd Torah - 6 p'sukim - Bamidbar 7:24-29

When Shabbat Chanuka is not the first and last day of Chanuka - in other words, when there is only one Shabbat Chanuka, then Maftir is the 6-pasuk portion of the gifts of the tribal leader of the day to the Dedication of the Mishkan. (The readings for the first and last day include more. When Shabbat is also Rosh Chodesh, the maftir is in the third Torah, but still a 6-pasuk piece.

For day 2 of Chanuka (ours and Chanukat HaMizbei'ach the first time around), the leader of the tribe of Yissachar offered his gifts. N'tan-el b. Tzu'ar brought exactly what each of the other Nesi'im brought, but the Torah repeats the details, so that each tribe "has its day", so to speak. Some commentaries describe different significances to the same items, for each tribe, further highlighting the individual natures of the tribes.

Haftara - 21 p'sukim - Zacharia 2:14-4:7

The Haftara for Shabbat Chanuka is "borrowed" from B'ha'alot'cha, the Menora being the obvious connection.

Chanuka has parallels throughout history.

The opening words of the Haftara are G-d's promise to dwell among us. This is the purpose of having built the Mishkan and the Beit HaMikdash in the first place, and this is the purpose of rededicating it, as we did on Chanuka.

The Haftara contains the vision of olive oil miraculously flowing into the gold Menora flanked by olive trees. This vision matches so much of the Chanuka story.

It is also the basis of the emblem of the State of Israel. This is particularly significant in light of the meaning of the vision. The message to the king, to Jewish leaders in general, is that our success is not measured by might and power, but rather by the spirit of G-d. This was an important message for the Chashmona'im and it remains a vital message for the leaders of today's Israel.

Aside from the obvious connection between Chanuka and the original Chanukat HaMizbei'ach of the Mishkan - as in Dedication and Re-dedication of the Mikdash, there is another, more specific connection, which tightens things up neatly.

It is said that... The original Mishkan was completed and "ready to roll" on the 25th of Kislev, more than 8 months out of Egypt. The dedication was postponed until the first of Nisan, in honor

of Yitzchak Avinu, who was born during Nissan. To inaugurate the Mishkan in honor of Yitzchak, is a good choice, because he was actually placed on a Mizbei'ach and was to be offered as an Olah. Yitzchak is like the patron of the Mikdash.

Over 1100 years later, Kislev 25 finally got its Chanuka. So the Torah reading of Chanuka is particularly appropriate. And there is also a connection to 25 Kislev from the original building of the second Beit HaMikdash. Chanuka is a perfect fit, just where it is in the calendar.