

B'SHALACH

Shabbat Shira

16th of 54 sedras;
4th of 11 in Sh'mot



Written on 215.33 lines (ranks 17th)

14 parshiot; 9 open, 5 closed

116 p'sukim - rank: 23 (6th in Sh'mot)

1681 words - rank: 19 (4th in Sh'mot)

6423 letters - rank: 18 (4th in Sh'mot)

Higher ranking for lines is definitely due to the format of the SHIRA column, which has a lot of blank space. Higher ranking for words and letters is due to larger p'sukim than average.

MITZVOT

B'SHALACH contains a single mitzva of the 613, the prohibition of leaving one's Shabbat boundary - T'CHUM SHABBAT (Ramban does not count T'CHUM SHABBAT as one of Taryag)

Aliya-by-Aliya Sedra Summary

[P>] and [S>] 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.

Remember to take a bird to lunch this Friday - HAKARAT HATOV see CALnotes

Kohen - First Aliya - 14 p'sukim - 13:17-14:8

[S> 13:17 (6)] "When Par'o sends the People...", G-d leads them along a circuitous route to prevent them from panicking and returning to Egypt. Moshe, in fulfillment of the promise made to Yosef by his brothers, takes Yosef's remains out of Egypt with the People.

SDT: Our Tradition is that the remains of all of the sons of Yaakov were brought out of Egypt. Why was Moshe, from the tribe of Levi, the one who took care of ATZMOT YOSEF? It has been suggested that Moshe was atoning for and effecting a TIKUN for his great-grandfather's role in the Sale of Yosef.

(Heard from Rabbi Jeff Bienenfeld)

G-d provided an escort for the People in the form of a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire at night.

[P> 14:1 (14)] G-d tells Moshe of His plan to lead the People in such a way that Par'o will pursue them in the misguided hope of bringing them back to Egypt.

When Par'o is notified (by spies whom he had sent to accompany the Israelites) of the People's whereabouts, he (with G-d's help in making his heart

"heavy", i.e. strong) takes a potent force with him and chases after the People of Israel.

SDT: "And G-d did not allow them to go DERECH ERETZ P' LISHTIM. Literally, they did not take the straight route to the territory of the Philistines. One commentator suggests an interesting DRASH based on a play on words. G-d did not take the People out of Egypt in DERECH ERETZ, in the normal, natural way of things, but in a miraculous way. Normally, bread comes from the ground; for the People of Israel, G-d sent them bread from above. Normally, water comes from above; for the People of Israel, G-d provided water from below, from a rock and from the miraculous Well that accompanied them on their journey, in the merit of Miriam. Not taking us out in a natural manner, leaves us with no doubt that it was indeed G-d Who took us out of Egypt. This is a crucial foundation stone of Judaism. Not only did we get out of Mitzrayim, but it was G-d Who took us out. Not only did He take us out, but the people knew and know it well.

G-d's opening words at Sinai make the point abundantly clear.

Levi - Second Aliya -
6 p'sukim - 14:9-14

The mighty Egyptian army pursues the People. When the People of Israel

see them coming, they are greatly frightened because there is no place to flee. They complain to Moshe that it would have been better to have died in Egypt. Moshe reassures the People, encourages them not to fear, promises them that G-d will fight on their behalf, and tells them that Egypt will soon cease to exist.

SDT: It seems that Par'o actually thought that he let the People go - that he expelled the People from Egypt. That's even what it seems to say at the beginning of this week's sedra (When Par'o sent the people out...). G-d arranged to have Par'o run after them. Then the events make it crystal clear to him - and to us - that G-d, and only G-d took us out of Egypt. Without this part of the Exodus process, Par'o and his people - and probably some Jews as well - would think that Par'o had a part in letting us leave Egypt. With the opening statement of the Aseret HaDibrot stating, I am HaShem, your G-d, Who took you out of Mitzrayim... this point is essential. And this was prophesied together with the Terms of Redemption - specifically, VIDATEM, and you shall know...

Sh'lishi - Third Aliya -
11 p'sukim - 14:15-25

[P> 14:15 (11)] G-d "asks" Moshe why the People are screaming; let them just move on.

SDT: Our Sages teach us that there are times when prayer is called for, and other times when action is the order of the day. G-d says: MA TITZ'AK EILAI, why cry out to Me? MA is spelled MEM-HEI. MEM can represent the 40 days and 40 nights that Moshe was to spend in prayer on behalf of the People following the Sin of the Golden Calf. MEM represents long prayer. HEI can stand for the simple but eloquent 5-word prayer for Miriam's recovery from Tzora'at which she contracted in punishment for speaking disrespectfully of Moshe - KEIL NA R'FA NA LAH. And sometimes, neither short nor long prayer is appropriate. At this point of the Exodus, the order of the day was decisive action. Move it! We must know when to pray and when to act first, and when to do both. (Or at least to give it our best shot.)

G-d tells Moshe to raise his hand over the Sea and split it, so the People will be able to pass through it on dry land. G-d informs Moshe that He will again harden Egypt's heart so that they will continue their pursuit. The Egyptians will finally know G-d's Might. The guardian angel (pillar of cloud) that was leading the People now was repositioned between the Jews and the Egyptian army, preventing contact.

Moshe raises his hand above the Sea and G-d causes a powerful easterly wind to blow all night, followed by a parting of the waters. The People of

Israel enter the Sea on dry land, between walls of water.

Egypt boldly follows, but their arrogant attitude abruptly changes to fear and panic as their chariots lose their wheels and bog down in the seabed. (This is in sharp contrast with the perfectly dry land beneath the feet of Israel.)

Egypt finally (too late) acknowledges G-d, not only now, but retroactively, as the One Who had fought for Israel in Egypt.

SDT: Why the strong wind blowing all night? Could not G-d have split the Sea with the proverbial snap of a finger? The answer is: Of course He could. But the night's preparation for the miracles of the day serves several purposes. Egypt is lulled into a false sense of security when something is happening that they can explain. They don't want to accept the idea that the G-d of Israel is performing miracles for His people. No doubt, their wizards (call them meteorologists, this time) explained the desert winds and the effects it can have. Among the Jews, there are always individuals who would like not to admit to G-d's awesome powers. They too will have their "excuse" in the natural components of the miracle. Perhaps, most importantly, this wind (and the like) allows us to relate to and better appreciate, the miracles themselves. A snap of the finger brings results too quickly for us to think about what is

happening. A night to ponder what was going on, further enhanced the appreciation of the Children of Israel for what had happened, was happening, and was to happen - what and when! Mixing the natural with the supernatural will often enhance the miracle by allowing us to relate to it better.

R'vi'i - Fourth Aliya - 32 p'sukim - 14:26-15:26

[P> 14:26 (6)] Moshe is now instructed by G-d to raise his hand once more over the Sea so that the waters may return. He does so and the Egyptians drown. The People, however, have succeeded in passing through the Sea and are ecstatic in their salvation. They attain true belief and trust in G-d and in Moshe His servant.

SDT: Rambam states that complete, solid, lasting faith in G-d was attained at Sinai. Here we must say that the belief was great, but not yet permanent. One telling hint towards the tenuousness of belief as a result of "flashy" miracles alone is the word UVMOSHE - they believed in G-d AND IN MOSHE His servant. The only other occurrence of that word UVMOSHE is in Bamidbar after Aharon dies and there was a battle against Emori, the people were disgusted with their wandering and spoke against G-d and Moshe. That's the other extreme of belief - same word occurs at both

extremes.

[P> 15:1 (19)] Next comes the Song of the Sea. What makes the Song of the Sea so special is that it is a direct quote of the People of Israel that G-d put into His Torah, verbatim. In other words, the rest of the Torah is written by G-d; we composed this part. It is an inspiring passage that has been incorporated into our daily prayer.

This 19-pasuk parsha is unique in the way it is written in a Sefer Torah. The column that contains the Shira is wider than all the other columns in the Torah. It is a Tradition to start the column with 5 lines belonging to the previous parsha, beginning with the word HABA'IM. Then a line is left blank and then the first line of AZ YASHIR is written all the way across the column. The next line has one word, a blank space, a group of words (from 3-5), another blank space, and then a single word to end the line. Let's call this, line-pattern A. The next line starts with a group of words (2-5), a space, and another group of words (3-5). We'll call this, line-pattern B. After the first line, the rest of the Shira parsha consists of another 29 lines, alternating patterns A and B, ending with an A. Then a line is skipped. Five more "regular" lines of Torah text finish off the column. The column with the Shira has many blank spaces and two blank lines.

The following is straight from the

Living Torah by Rav Aryeh Kaplan:

VAYOSHA HASHEM BAYOM HAHU... Thus, on that day, God rescued the Israelites from Egypt. The Israelites saw the Egyptians dead on the seashore.

The Israelites saw the great power that God had unleashed against Egypt, and the people were in awe of God. They believed in God and in Moshe His servant.

AZ YASHIR MOSHE UVNEI YISRAEL... Moshe and the Israelites then sang this song to God. It went:

I will sing to God for His great victory,
Horse and rider He threw in the sea.

My strength and song is God And this is my deliverance;
This is my God, I will enshrine Him, My father's God, I will exalt Him.

God is the Master of war, God is His name.

Pharaoh's chariots and army He cast in the sea;
His very best officers Were drowned in the Red Sea.

The depths covered them; They sank to the bottom
Like a stone.

Your right Hand, O God Is awesome in power;
Your right Hand, O God crushes the foe.

In Your great Majesty You broke Your opponents;
You sent forth Your wrath It devoured them like straw.

At the blast of Your Nostrils the waters

towered. Flowing water stood like a wall. The depths congealed In the heart of the sea.

The enemy said, 'I will give chase; I will overtake, divide the spoils I will satisfy myself. I will draw my sword; My hand will demolish them.'

You made Your wind blow; The sea covered them. They sank like lead In the mighty waters.

Who is like You among powers, God? Who is like You, majestic in holiness, Awesome in praise, doing wonders?

You put forth Your right Hand; The earth swallowed them.

With love, You led the people You redeemed; With might, You led [them] to Your holy shrine.

Nations heard and shuddered; Terror gripped those who dwell in Philistia.

Edom's chiefs then panicked; Moav's heroes were seized with trembling; Canaan's residents melted away.

Fear and dread fell upon them. At the greatness of Your Arm They are still as stone. Until Your people crossed, O God, Until the people You gained crossed over.

O bring them and plant them On the mount You possess. The place You dwell in Is Your accomplishment, God. The shrine of God Your Hands have founded.

God will reign forever and ever.

[This song was sung] when Pharaoh's horse came into the sea, along with his chariot corps and cavalry, and God made the sea come back on them. The Israelites had walked on dry land in the midst of the sea.

VATIKACH MIRIAM HAN'VI'A...
Miriam the prophetess, Aharon's sister, took the drum in her hand, and all the women followed her with drums and dancing.

Miriam led them in the response, 'Sing to God for His great victory, horse and rider He cast in the sea.'

Ed. note: I do not usually put text in the SedraSummary, but The Song of the Sea - SHIRAT HAYAM is special. On that note...

It is the common practice in (Ashkenazic) shuls for the congregation to stand for the reading of Shirat HaYam. This custom does NOT have the objections that some authorities have concerning the standing for the ASERET HADIBROT. (A discussion on that will probably be in next week's PhiloTorah.) In fact, the standing for AZ YASHIR is motivated by an excitement and enthusiasm, as we re-experience the events of the Exodus. Standing for ASERET HADIBROT has its objections; not so for AZ YASHIR (or the last pasuk (CHAZAK) of each Book of the Torah).

[P> 15:20 (2)] Following the Shira portion is a 2-pasuk parsha describing

Miriam's rallying of the women to join in the Shira in their own way.

[S> 15:22 (5)] The People continue their journey and fail to find water for three days. When they do find some, they complain bitterly (pun intended) of the inability to drink it. G-d directs Moshe to perform a miracle by throwing a special piece of wood into the water whereby the water becomes sweet.

SDT: Aside from the literal meaning of the text, this episode is considered an allusion to the primacy of Torah in the life of a Jew. Both Torah and water sustain life - spiritual and physical. In the same vein, "3 days without water" hints at and inspires the practice of our reading from the Torah on Monday and Thursday, as well as on Shabbat, so that in our wandering in the spiritual desert of life, we will not go 3 days without spiritual water. This is but one "use" of the analogy between Torah and water. This idea is not just a matter of DRASH. The parsha's last pasuk tells that if we will harken to G-d's Voice and follow the Torah, keep the mitzvot... then all the ills that befell Egypt will not be put upon us... Water & Torah, Water is Torah point to the partnership of Body & Soul which defines us as human beings and especially as Jews.

Chamishi - 5th Aliya - 11 p'sukim - 15:27-16:10

[S> 15:27 (4)] The People next travel to Eilim and from there to Midbar Tsin, en route to Sinai. This time, they complain about the lack of food.

[S> 16:4 (7)] G-d tells Moshe about the manna (MAHN) which He will soon provide for the People. Moshe tells the People that they will soon see how G-d hears and listens to their complaints. MAHN is not just the food that sustains the people, it is also a crucial test of the faith that the people should have in G-d. (We find Moshe reiterating this aspect of the MAHN in Parshat Eikev.) The MAHN was to fall daily except for Shabbat, and was not allowed to be left over night (except for what fell on Friday). This facilitated a constant strengthening of our faith in G-d - the need to "trust" Him every single day.

Shishi - Sixth Aliya - 26 p'sukim - 16:11-36

[P> 16:11 (17)] The account of the MAHN continues... Quail miraculously appear in the evening, and the people eat "meat". On the next morning, the MAHN - protected by a layer of dew above and below it - appears. The People are fascinated by it and when they question Moshe, he explains the rules and procedures set down by G-d. Nonetheless, there were some who left over MAHN from one day to the next, and this angered Moshe. And, despite

being told that the MAHN will NOT fall on Shabbat, there were individuals who went out to search for it.

[S> 16:28 (9)] G-d "takes note" of this display of lack of faith and "asks" how long we will continue to refuse to keep His commands.

The parsha of the MAHN is our first real introduction to Shabbat. This is the meaning of the line in DAYEINU, Had You given us the Shabbat and not brought us near Har Sinai, DAYEINU, there would be sufficient reason to thank You... Although Shabbat is an integral part of Revelation at Sinai (commandment #4), it actually predates Matan Torah.

From the episode of the MAHN we learn the important lesson that Shabbat is honored by being prepared for. It is not just a corollary of the prohibitions of Shabbat that we prepare our food in advance; it is an essential feature of Shabbat and the role of the days of the week.

Included in the instructions about the MAHN is the command not to "leave our PLACE on the seventh day (to collect the MAHN)". This was not just a rule for that generation; it is a mitzva among the 613 - the mitzva of T'chum Shabbat [24, L321 16:29].

Briefly, the point of T'CHUM is not about how far we may walk on Shabbat. It is about how far AWAY FROM HOME we may go. This is

obvious from the halachic details of T'CHUM. The weekdays are for going. Shabbat is for staying put (as defined by halacha) and being able to "relax", to ponder G-d's Creation and Mastery over all.

A sample of MAHN was stored as a remembrance for future generations.

MITZVAnotes

It is important to understand that the prohibition of T'CHUM, be it from the Torah or from the Sages, was not meant to put a limit on physical exertion or the distance a person may walk on Shabbat. A person who lives in a house in yemsvelt which is located on a small plot of land with a fence around it, is restricted to a distance of about a kilometer outside his fence, in any direction. Another person who lives in a big city can walk from one end to the other - from Gilo to Ramot and back again (or Washington Heights to the Bowery) - miles and miles - and not have a problem of T'CHUM at all. And even the first guy with the house near no others, can walk around and around his property all Shabbat long. As long as he does not go outside his T'CHUM, he's okay. (Not really, because he has to figure out why he spends all Shabbat walking in circles around his house, rather than learning Torah, taking a nap, and spending quality time with his family.)

The topics of T'CHUM and EIRUV are complex. This only touched on a few points.

Rambam holds that T'chum is a Torah prohibition, but only if one exceeds 24,000 amot (approx. 12 km.). The Sages reduced the limit to only 2000 amot. Ramban says that T'chum Shabbat is totally d'Rabanan - a prohibition from the Sages. Both, therefore, agree that the Rabbinic prohibition is not to exceed 2000 amot.

Sh'VII - Seventh Aliya - 16 p'sukim - 17:1-16

[P> 17:1 (7)] The People journey to R'fidim and again complain about the lack of water. (It is not the complaint itself that "angers" G-d - it is the apparent lack of faith and the doubt in the value of the Exodus that casts a negative light on the People.) In response, G-d tells Moshe to gather the Elders and People and strike a rock in their presence with his miraculous staff. The result is water for the People.

[P> 17:8 (6)] The final nine p'sukim, which is also the Torah reading of Purim morning (and the Maftir for Shabbat Purim in Yerushalayim this year), tell of Amalek's attack on the fledgling nation of Israel. It is the archetypical fight against those who would seek to destroy us. This battle repeats itself differently throughout Jewish History.

[P> 17:14 (3)] G-d tells Moshe to write down and tell Yehoshua that I (G-d) will wipe out the memory of Amalek... This is not just Israel's battle, but G-d's as well.

SDT: It is significant to take a look at the pasuk that immediately precedes the portion of the attack by Amalek -

"He named the place Masa u'Meriva [testing and quarreling] because of the quarrel of the children of Israel and because of their testing G-d, saying, Is G-d in our midst or not? (Sh'mot 17:7)

It could be that the questioning as to whether HaShem is in our midst makes us vulnerable to attacks from the Amaleks of the world.

Differently, but essentially the same (I know that it sounds contradictory), is Parshat Zachor at the end of Parshat Ki Teitzei. There, the previous topic right before Amalek, is the possession of false weights and measures. It is considered an abomination before G-d, and non-halachic business practices can be seen as opening the way to Amalek to attack us. Between the Jew and G-d in B'shalach; between the Jew and his fellow Jew, in Ki Teitzei.

Haftara - 52 p'sukim - Sho-f'tim 4:4-5:31

In the time of the Judges, Bnei Yisrael found themselves cruelly oppressed. In the sedra it was Par'o; in the haftara it is Yavin and his general, Sisra. D'vora enlists Barak to lead an army against them. With the success of the battle, D'vora sang a song of praise and thanks to G-d, similar in nature to that of Moshe and Bnei Yisrael in the parsha. So too, the People's faith in G-d had similar "ups and downs" to those in the sedra. D'vora was key to restoring a high level of faith in G-d among the People and in leading the People to great victories.

Both Shirat HaYam and Shirat D'vora are written in the same unusual style.

S'faradim read just the Song of D'vora as the haftara of B'shalach. Ashkenazim start earlier and include in the reading the story of Sisra's temporary escape from Barak and his army, only to find his demise at the hand (and tent peg) of Yael, wife of Chever HaKeini.

From A Candle by Day by Rabbi Shraga Silverstein z"l

Some do not so much feel that they have a contribution to make, as they have to make a contribution.

Our conviction in the rightness of a thing is often mistaken for the rightness of the thing itself.