

BO

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



Written on 205.67 lines; ranks 24th

14 parshiot; 8 open, 6 closed

106 p'sukim - rank: 29th (7th in Sh'm)
tied with To-l'dot & Vayigash; but
larger than each one, otherwise

1655 words - ranks 21st (5th in Sh'm)

6149 letters - ranks 20th (6th in Sh'm)

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 positive, 11 prohibitions

This ends an 18-sedra run (1/3 of the
54 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 (0.8% of the 613).
The other 36 sedras (2/3 of the Torah)
have the other 608! (99.2%)

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.

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 HaTurim points out
that when G-d sends Moshe to the
royal palace, He uses the term BO
(come). When He sends him to the
river to find Par'o there, He uses the
term LEICH (go). One could suggest
that BO means, I'll be with you, as
with 'Come with Me.'

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.

On the topic of G-d hardening Par'o's heart, there is a famous and obvious question.

What happens to Free Will when G-d hardens Par'o's heart?

One opinion says, Par'o no longer had Free Will at this point. Usually, a person loses his Free Will when he dies, or is in some way incapacitated. In Par'o's case, he had ample opportunity to exercise his Free Will until the 6th plague. He chose to refuse to let the Israelites leave, each time. From the 6th plague and on, G-d's hardening his heart, forced him to continue refusing in order for the whole course of the Plagues to play out.

Interesting, the other opinion is that it was necessary (so to speak) for G-d to harden his heart in order for Par'o to continue exercising his Free Will. Without G-d's strengthening Par'o, Par'o would give in - not because he wanted to, but because the beatings

wore him down. By G-d's making Par'o stronger, Par'o was able to continue using his Free Will - which he did by refusing Moshe's demands - until after Makat B'chorot.

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.

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 and Par'o again refuses to let the Israelites go.

[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. 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.

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.

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.

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

Shabbat was sanctified by G-d as His final act of Creation. That is our first exposure to the concept of Sanctity of Time.

Here is the next step. It comes in the form of the first mitzva commanded to Bnei Yisrael, even before we left Egypt.

The words in the Written Torah are HACHODESH HAZE LACHEM... and we are taught that this is the mitzva to set up the Jewish Calendar.

The two major components of this mitzva are the sanctification of each Rosh Chodesh - from which follows the sanctity, K'DUSHA, of the holy days that fall within a given month.

The other aspect of the Calendar is the intercalation (love that word; rarely get to use it) of a month into the year so that Pesach (and Sukkot) will fall in their proper seasons.

G-d gave this second act of K'DUSHAT Z'MAN - making the Calendar - to the Jewish People to perform. Basically, He said, I want you to be pro-active in this act of Sanctification of Time. You do it, and the first of the month will be holy, and so will all the holy days of the calendar.

If you don't sanctify the first of Nisan, (hypothetical only) then the 15th of Nisan will not be Pesach. It will be a regular day. No prohibition of Melacha, no Seder, no mitzva to eat matza, no prohibition of Chametz - just a regular day. You (meaning us) are in charge of this level of K'dushat Z'man.

G-d commands us as to when the holy days are to be, but it is Bnei Yisrael that declares them and sanctifies them.

Today, between Sanhedrins, we use a fixed calendar, the Rosh Chodesh of every month having been sanctified by a Sanhedrin of long ago.

When we have a sitting Sanhedrin - past and IYH the near future - the process of declaring Rosh Chodesh relies on eye-witness testimony to the first visibility of the lunar crescent.

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 613 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, it is to be 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]. It was to be eaten with "belt tied", in haste, ready to leave (these last details are for the Egyptian Pesach only).

MITZVAnotes

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 many 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 Egyptian firstborns, and "pass-over" the Jewish homes 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 KAREIT, 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".

MITZVAnotes

Without too much detail, what seems to be a 'simple' matter of 'needed for food', is not simple at all. Our Sages explain that permission to do certain Melacha on Yom Tov includes not just pertaining to food, but for other needs of Yom Tov, as well. You can boil water on Yom Tov for a glass of tea (OCHEL NEFESH) - and you can boil up water to wash your face (TZORECH YOM TOV). You can handle a lit candle to light the gas in order to cook - and you can also handle a candle and light others, in order to read by.

That we shall say is an expansion of the Written Torah's directive. On the other hand, the categories of Melacha permitted for OCHEL NEFESH (to feed us) are limited by the Oral Law. One example, you can't pick an apple off a tree on Yom Tov, to eat it.

The source of "sh'mura" matza is in 12:17.

MITZVAnotes

SH'MURA, as far as matza is concerned is more than just making sure the matza is totally non-chameitz. Regular Pesach Matza is guarded from becoming chameitz from the time of the grinding of the flour until the matzot are completely baked. SH'MURA MATZA has additional guarding - specifically, from the time the wheat is cut from the ground. Furthermore, SH'MURA MATZA is baked with specific intention for the fulfillment of the mitzva to eat matza - not just to provide us with Kosher L'Pesach matza to eat.

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].

MITZVAnotes

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.

Note well that getting to Eretz Yisrael was always part of the Plan; it was stated as such when G-d spoke to Moshe at the burning bush and when G-d sent Moshe to tell Him of G-d's Plan - V'HOTZEITI... V'HEIVEITI.

Moshe tells the people that which G-d had previously commanded him to tell them. Here it says: Take a bundle of hyssop (EIZOV - 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..." (not, if)

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" (HAMASHCHIT, 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 of "regularly scheduled deaths", so to speak. 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.

Remember, something similar occurred at the beginning of the enslavement, when the midwives were ordered to not allow the baby boys to live. According to our Tradition, the midwives not only defied Par'o, but prayed that no boys would be stillborn, lest people think that they followed Par'o's orders.

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 - the mere prophecy of it). 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] (officially, a mitzva, but definitely not preferred).

The Torah reiterates the significance of the younger generation asking and receiving answers about the origin of the Nation. T'filin is/are also repeated.

The two final portions of BO (all of

Sh'vi'i) join the two first portions of the Sh'ma as the four passages of the Torah contained in each of the two T'filin. In the SHEL YAD, the four parshiot are written on one piece of parchment. In the SHEL ROSH, they are each written on separate pieces of KLAF and inserted into four separate compartments.

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.

It depends on us.

If we improve our commitment to G-d and His Torah and Land - in numbers and quality, and if we do the 'leg work' (so to speak) of Melech HaMashi'ach in Ingathering ourselves and our fellow Jews - to the best of our ability, leaving the rest of Kibutz Galuyot to Mashiach, but doing a good job on our own, and if we prepare psychologically, emotionally, educationally, and practically for the third Beit HaMik-

dash - then we can hasten the Geula Sh'leima. And, it will be a smooth transition because of our preparation and readiness.

If not, chas v'shalom, then the Geula will happen at its time (which we do not know) and will be preceded by many difficulties.

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.