

VAYEIRA

4th of the 54 sedras; **PhiloTorahStats**
4th of 12 sedras
in B'reishit



Written on 252 lines in a Torah,
ranks: 5th

6 Parshiyot; 4 open, 2 closed

147 p'sukim - ranks 7th
(4th in B'reishit)

2085 words - ranks 2nd
(1st in B'reishit)

7862 letters - rank: 3rd
(2nd in B'reishit)

P'sukim above average in length
(words and letters per pasuk)
explains its rise in rankings from
p'sukim to words (and letters).
Vayeira is actually the 2nd largest
sedra in the Torah. (Naso, is #1 with
no rival - Bamidbar, Pinchas, and R'ei
all take up more lines than Vayeira,
but those sedras each have many
parshiyot, which means a lot of blank
space between parshiyot, which adds
to the line-count.)

MITZVOT

None of the 613 mitzvot (TARYAG) are
in Vayeira (one of 17 sedras without
entries on the list of 613) - however,
there are Midot and values and other
lessons.

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.

Kohen - First Aliya - 14 p'sukim - 18:1-14

[P> 18:1 (71)] And G-d appeared to him
(Avraham)...

SDT: Rather than the expected - G-d
appeared to Avraham, a pronoun is
used instead. EILAV (to him) refers us
back to the end of the previous
parsha - Avraham's circumcision,
indicating that the purpose of G-d's
visit with Avraham was Bikur Cholim,
visiting the sick. It is also pointed out
by commentators that the Torah does
not tell us what G-d said to Avraham -
as it usually does when we have
VAYEIRA HASHEM... Therefore,
commentaries teach us that G-d was
visiting the sick, even though the
Written Word does not say that
specifically. And this is one of the
attributes of G-d which we are to
emulate.

Another observation on the opening
words of the sedra: Rather than
saying VAYEIRA HASHEM EILAV, it
says EILAV first, then HASHEM. If we
can draw from the commentaries on
VAYIKRA EL MOSHE, VAYDABEIR

HASHEM EILAV... which is taken as a supreme compliment that G-d was paying Moshe, by putting Moshe first before His own Name - we can say that G-d is also complimenting Avraham, by referring to him first and then using HaShem's name.

He is sitting at the entrance of his tent (watching for travelers to welcome) in the heat of the day.

SDT: It was unnaturally hot; that was G-d's doing, to spare Avraham the bother of visitors, He removed the Sun from its 'envelope'... However, Avraham is distressed by the absence of visitors, so G-d sends three angels to him in the guise of wayfarers. We have a lesson-within-a-lesson here. To be careful to do for others - especially the ill and elderly (but for anyone, really) - what THEY (need, of course, and) want, not what WE want, and not what we THINK they want. Also, to realize that there are exceptions to rules. Some people like being fussed about; others don't. For some, taking things easy is therapeutic. For others, action is their medicine. Avraham did not want to take things easy, even though he was ailing. So G-d, so-to-speak, accommodated him by sending the angels as people.

That G-d was visiting the sick, is Rashi. Other commentaries say differently:

Rabbeinu HaM'yuchas says "to discuss S'dom".

S'forno: To confirm that He stood by the Covenant.

Ohr HaChayim: To make known that the Sh'china resided with Avraham and that he would be a vehicle for the Sh'china.

from Otzar M'forschei HaP'shat

Avraham sees the three "men" and runs to greet them, after asking G-d to wait for him (so to speak). (From here we are taught the greatness of the mitzva of Hachnasat Orchim.)

This is one of the ways to interpret the pasuk - that ADO-NAI means G-d, and that Avraham was addressing Him. ADONAI can also mean "my sirs", in which case Avraham could have been speaking to the men/angels. Each possibility causes minor awkwardness in the flow of the p'sukim.

SDT: "Speak little, but do much." This maxim from Pirkei Avot is manifest in Avraham Avinu's behavior. He offers the angels a bit of water and some bread, but in fact prepares for them (with the help of Sara and Yishmael) a sumptuous meal. Avraham and Sara are the ultimate models for hospitality, one of the hallmarks of the Jewish People. We must learn from them and emulate them.

[What was the main dish that was served to the people/angels? Rashi quotes the gemara, saying it was tongue in mustard (sauce).]

One of the angels informs Avraham of the pending birth of Yitzchak. Sara's reaction is to laugh (expressing a slight doubt in the ability of a 100 year old man to father a child and of a 90 year old woman to give birth). G-d asks Avraham why Sara would doubt His ability to permit an old woman to conceive.

Levi - Second Aliya - 19 p'sukim - 18:15-33

Sara would like to deny that she laughed (and doubted), but she cannot.

The three angels each had a single task: One to heal Avraham, one to announce the birth of Yitzchak (both missions accomplished), the third to destroy S'dom. That angel is now accompanied by Refa'el, whose new task is to save Lot and family. Avraham escorts the angels on their way to S'dom.

SDT: Once again, we learn the correct behavior of a proper host from Avraham: namely, to escort your guests as they leave your home. It is even said that escorting out is greater than ushering in.

HaShem next tells Avraham of his intention to destroy S'dom. Avraham pleads and bargains on their behalf,

but there aren't enough righteous people to save the cities.

The dialog between Avraham and HaShem is an astounding (and unique) example of the close relationship between them.

Angel Arithmetic

Three angels were sent to Avraham. They had four tasks among them: Heal Avraham from his recent Mila, announce the birth of Yitzchak, save Lot, and destroy S'dom. Why didn't G-d send four angels to do his bidding?

And if we suggest that once the angel of healing and the one to announce the upcoming birth of Yitzchak had done their jobs, they can take on new tasks, then three wouldn't be necessary - two would suffice. But is G-d stingy with angels?

Maayana shel Torah quotes the Chidushei HaRim who suggests that Lot's being saved was not originally a done-deal. He was lacking in merit and his being Avraham's nephew might not have been sufficient to save him.

Originally, there were three tasks for three angels: Heal Avraham, announce the birth of Yitzchak, destroy S'dom. Three angels with three missions.

But Lot might have had another merit to be worthy of being saved. He was

also to be the ancestor of Ruth HaMo'aviya. That would push him over the top, so to speak, but only if she would be allowed to marry into the Jewish People.

The Torah bans a Moavite from entering into K'hal HaShem. Is the ban on males only or does it include females?

A future Sanhedrin ruled that female Moavites could marry into the Jewish People and the ban was only on the males who confronted Israel with hostility and refused us food and water. Women generally are modest and remain in the background when the males aggressively confront outsiders.

To whom do we attribute this modest behavior of the women of the nations of the world? To the mother of a multitude of nations, SARA IMEINU. When the angels asked Avraham where she was, he answered, She is in the tent. This symbolizes a feminine trait of modesty and non-confrontation of strangers that allowed that future Sanhedrin to rule that Ruth the Moavite could indeed marry Boaz and become the Mother of Royalty. This got Lot his merit to be saved, and one of the angels that had just fulfilled his task was then sent on to S'dom with the Destroying Angel, to save Avraham's nephew and the great-great-great...grandfather of David HaMelech and the entire Malchut Beit

David, until Melech HaMashiach and beyond.

Lot did not merit an angel being sent to save him initially, but he picked up the merit (and the angel) en route (so to speak), thanks to Sara Imeinu and the future Mother of Royalty, Ruth HaMoaviya.

With human beings, one can have merit for past deeds and additional merit because of his parents or grandparents. But HKB"H can give credit, so to speak, based on the future (and without even affecting one's Free Will - but that's another discussion altogether).

Although this vort is the Chidush HaRim's and is found in Wellsprings of Torah, I extend credit to Dr. Paul Slater from whom I heard this D'var Torah a long time ago, before I saw it anywhere.

As long as I'm acknowledging the source of a d'var Torah, let me also give credit to my 7th & 8th grade rebbi, HaRav Chayim Segal z"l. Whenever a student in the class would give an answer or make a statement that was already presented by one of the Gemara commentaries, he would have us write in our notebooks that we heard the vort or chidush from Yossi and that it was in the Maharsha (for example). He said: You didn't see it in the Maharsha; you heard it from Yossi. He gets the credit as your source.

Shlishi - Third Aliya - 20 p'sukim - 19:1-20

The two angels arrive in S'dom and are taken in by Lot. [The nephew of Avraham Avinu has learned something from his uncle.] The people of S'dom demonstrate their evil nature. It is clear from the p'sukim as well as Midrashim and commentaries, that Lot was not sufficiently pious or believing in his own right, but he compared favorably with the people among whom he lived, and he had merit as the nephew of Avraham. (And as the progenitor of Ruth!)

SDT: The word "and he lingered" is read with the rare trop-mark, the shalsholet, which musically emphasizes the reluctance of Lot to believe what he was told by the angels and leave at their command. In contrast to this behavior of Lot, the same word is used in describing the haste with which the Children of Israel left Egypt at G-d's command, symbolized by the matza which they hastily baked rather than linger for the dough to rise and produce a "proper" bread - demonstrating their faith and confidence in G-d. Interesting, is it not, that Lot is described as baking matzot for the visitors. Rashi's comment: It was Pesach. Which gives us a double association for the contrast between Lot and the people of Israel (Pesach/matza and the unusual word L'HIT-MAH-MEI'AH).

Lot is led out of the city by the angels, his wife and two daughters with him. They are told to flee for their lives, without looking back at the destruction of the cities. Lot pleads for permission to seek refuge closer by.

R'vi'i - Fourth Aliya - 40 p'sukim - 19:21-21:4

2nd longest R'vi'i in the Torah

Once Lot and family are safely away, S'dom is destroyed. Lot's wife looks back - against orders - and turns into a pillar of salt. (Her punishment is specifically with salt as a measure-for-measure for her stinginess with guests - salt was a treasured commodity, which she refused to share with guests.)

From the episode of Lot's wife, we can draw the following point. Lot and family were worthy of being spared the destruction of S'dom, but they were not worthy enough to be able to witness the destruction. This, in contrast to Avraham, who views the destruction.

"And Avraham gets up early in the morning to the place where he STOOD before G-d."

SDT: Avraham returns to the same spot to speak to G-d. From here is derived the concept of having a MAKOM KAVU'A, a fixed place for prayer. The Talmud says: "he who fixes himself a place for davening, the G-d of Avraham will help him."

However, a fixed place in shul should NEVER be the cause of argument or discord. E.g. when a person comes late - or even on time - to shul and someone is sitting in "his seat", how to handle such a situation requires sensitivity - and often, the quality of a VATRAN, one willing to yield for the sake of calm.

Of course, more fundamentally, it is this pasuk and another that combine to "support" the Gemara's statement that Avraham instituted T'filat Shacharit.

The Torah reiterates the point that Lot was saved in the merit of his uncle Avraham Avinu (and Ruth, the "mother of royalty" who was to come from Lot - G-d can work merit either from the past or the future).

Lot's two daughters, having witnessed the total destruction of S'dom and its vicinity, assume that they are the sole survivors of mankind. They plot to get Lot drunk and sleep with him in order to continue humanity. Moav and Amon are the results.

A number of commentators suggest that Lot's (disgusting) offer of his daughters to the S'dom mob that demanded that he give them his guests, was thrown back at him when he got drunk and committed incest with each of them.

Note that everything that has happened so far in Vayeira, make up a

single long, 71-pasuk parsha. (How long? Very. Average p'sukim per parsha in the Torah is 8.67.) From the arrival of the angels through the completion of the final task of those angels - namely, the destruction of S'dom. Apparently, the different episodes all belong together more than one would initially think. The common thread, of course, is/are the angels. Their tasks are now complete.

[S> 20:1 (18)] Avraham and Sara now travel to G'rar where they again present themselves as brother and sister. Sara is taken to Avimelech, but G-d appears to him and warns him not to touch her. Avimelech confronts Avraham who explains that his fears were based on the lack of "Fear of G-d" in the place.

Avraham then prays on behalf of Avimelech and his people who were stricken with a disease which rendered them temporarily sterile.

From this point (21:1) to the end of Vayeira, is the Torah reading of Rosh HaShana (part on the first day, part on the second.)

[S> 21:1 (21)] G-d fulfills His promise and Sara becomes pregnant. She bears a son to Avraham in his advanced age, and the son is called Yitzchak. Avraham circumcises Yitzchak at eight days of age, as G-d has commanded.

Avraham's having prayed on behalf of Avimelech for children is juxtaposed

to Sara Imeinu conceiving. Our Sage teach us that selflessly praying for others can sometimes result in the same prayers being answered for yourself.

Chamishi - 5th Aliya - 17 p'sukim - 21:5-21

Avraham is 100 years old when Yitzchak is born. Avraham makes a great party upon the occasion of Yitzchak's being weaned (or maybe for the Brit).

As Yitzchak is growing up, Sara notices the potential negative influence on Yitzchak by Yishmael and she demands of Avraham that he send Yishmael and his mother Hagar, away.

Different m'forshim explain Sara's insistence that Yishmael and Hagar leave.

Blinded by his great "kind heart", Avraham has to be told by G-d to listen to Sara. Hagar and Yishmael once again are on the verge of death in the wilderness, but Yishmael's prayers are answered and they are saved. Hagar is assured by an angel that they will survive.

And indeed they do, and Hagar subsequently marries Yishmael off to a woman from the land of Egypt.

Shishi - Sixth Aliya - 13 p'sukim - 21:22-34

[P> 21:22 (13)] Avimelech and his commander Pichol enter into a pact with Avraham. The pact has to do with wells that Avraham dug, that the servants of Avimelech stole, the return of those wells and the acknowledgement by Avimelech that the wells do actually belong to Avraham. The city of Be'er Sheva receives its name from the double meaning of the 7 sheep used as tokens of the covenant and the oath sworn between them.

Avraham plants an EISHEL in Be'er Sheva. In addition to being a type of tree, the word ESHEIL is considered an acronym of the Hebrew words for Food, Drink, and Lodgings (or Food, Sleeping, Escort). EISHEL AVRAHAM is the symbol of hospitality for all times.

Sh'VII - Seventh Aliya - 24 p'sukim - 22:1-24

[P> 22:1 (19)] **This is the portion of the Binding of Isaac - Akeidat Yitzchak. The Akeida has been incorporated into our daily davening (some siddurim don't have it; some people don't say it - but it is very worthwhile to say it as a warm-up to a good davening). It is the ultimate manifestation of commitment to and love of G-d. It also belongs to the portion of the davening called KORBANOT for obvious reasons.**

FYI - The name AVRAHAM occurs 175 times in Tanach. Does that number ring a bell? Avraham lived 175 years. (61 AVRAMs in Tanach)

Although none of Avraham's descendants (we, the Jewish People) can ever be tested in so drastic a way (because we have the experiences of our predecessors to give us support), we do derive tremendous inspiration from this portion of the Torah. It is part of our Heritage and, even more, part of our Essence. Tests of Faith are relative to the individual. Each of us is challenged in different ways throughout our lives. So too, for us as a Nation. May we be always guided by deep commitment to Torah and Jewish values.

MORE. Akeidat Yitzchak defines who we are... even when our own behavior is contradictory to Torah standards. We stand before G-d on Rosh HaShana, and we blow the Shofar made from a ram's horn - a reminder of the Akeida. We ask G-d to remember Akeidat Yitzchak and have mercy on His (sometimes undeserving) children. We read the Akeida in the Torah and we refer to it repeatedly in our Rosh HaShana davening and Slichot, to inspire us and to identify us.

After these events, G-d tested Avraham - He told Avraham to take Yitzchak to Har HaMoriya and offer him as an Olah - an all-burnt sacrifice... Avraham enthusiastically set out to do G-d's bidding... On the third day, Avraham saw the intended place from afar and told the two lads (Eliezer and Yishmael, according to our Tradition)

to wait with the donkey... On the way, just Avraham and Yitzchak, hand in hand, Yitzchak asks where the animal for sacrifice is and Yitzchak understood what was to happen from Avraham's answer.

Once again, I point out that different m'forshim explain Yitzchak's awareness of what he was facing, differently.

Avraham built an altar, bound Yitzchak to it and was about to sacrifice him, when a heavenly angel told him to stop and not harm the "boy". Avraham spotted a ram (which our Tradition tells us might have been created specifically for this purpose in the instant before the first Shabbat of B'reishit, as one of the final acts of Creation) caught by its horns in a thicket. G-d acknowledges Avraham's dedication and blesses him again with countless descendants... Avraham and company return to Be'er Sheva.

[P> 22:20 (5)] The parsha ends with mention of the birth of Rivka, to link to the next phase of the development of Judaism - viz., the means of its transmission and continuity.

Maftir: final 5 p'sukim.

Haftara - 37 p'sukim - Melachim Bet 4:1-37

The sedra shows us the sharp contrast between the kindness and hospitality of Avraham & Sara on the one hand,

and the cruel "business is business" and "what's in it for me" nature of S'dom. The haftara is about the widow of a prophet who was facing losing her two children because of her poverty and the twisted state of Israel's society that HAD lost sight of the legacy of Avraham and Sara. The prophet Elisha performs a miracle (of olive oil miraculously filling many vessels that the woman had and borrowed and anointed with a few drops of oil she possessed) and the family is spared that plight.

The haftara also tells of the Shunamite woman who prayed so fervently for a son. She had a son but he died. He is miraculously resuscitated by Elisha. This forms a counterpart to the birth of Yitzchak and the subsequent almost-losing him at the Akeida. (And fits well with Midrashim that say that Yitzchak was actually sacrificed on the Altar and restored to life - we have references to AFARO SHEL YITZCHAK, the ashes of Yitzchak.)