CHAYEI SARA

5th of the 54 sedras;
5th of the 12 in B'rei.



Written on 171 lines in a Torah (37th)

4 Parshiyot; 3 open, 1 closed

105 p'sukim - ranks 32nd (11 in B'rei.) same as D'varim (which is longer)

1402 words - ranks 37th (11 in B'rei.)

5314 letters - ranks 36th (11 in B'rei.)

Chayei Sara has shorter than average p'sukim in a sedra with slightly below average number of p'sukim results in its being a smallish sedra.

MITZVOT

None of the 613 mitzvot are in Chayei Sara, however, as we mention often, there are Midot and values and other lessons to be learned.

One of the 17 mitzva-less sedras, 9 of which are in B'reishit, 3 in Sh'mot, none in Vayikra, 2 in Bamidbar, and 3 in D'varim.

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 - 16 p'sukim - 23:1-16

[P> 23:1 (20)] The parsha begins by telling us that Sara died in Kiryat Arba, which is Hevron. But first it tells us that she lived a full, long life of 127 years.

SDT: With the last topic of Vayeira being the AKEIDA, the juxtaposition of Sara's death supports the Tradition that Sara died as a result of the Akeida. The Midrash says that the Satan informed Sara about what Avraham was intending to do with Yitzchak when they went towards Har HaMoriah. The shock was too great for an old woman, and she died.

Some commentaries give an interesting twist to this. They say that Sara died, not from fear that Avraham would offer Yitzchak as a Korban, but rather that he might not! She remembered Avraham's reaction when she told him to banish Yishmael (and Hagar). She was afraid that Avraham's love and kindness towards Yitzchak would prevent him from carrying out G-d's command, and that Avraham would thus fail this ultimate test of faith. When she saw (or heard) that Avraham was returning with Yitzchak still alive, she thought her fears were realized and she died.

Avraham comes (some say from the Akeida, i.e. from Har HaMoriah; some say from Be'er Sheva; either way, it

was apparently to Hevron that he came) to eulogize Sara and to cry for her.

Avraham next makes the arrangements for providing a suitable place to bury Sara.

There is a Tradition that Avraham was aware of the burial place of Adam and Chava, and that is the piece of land he was interested in.

He turns to the people of CHEIT, one of whom is known as EFRON. They all exchange niceties and the people offer Avraham to bury Sara anywhere he wants. He insists on buying the place and paying full price - and that is what he does for the field and cave of Machpeila.

PIRKEI AVOT made famous that Avraham was tested 10 times. But the mishna does not enumerate the ten tests. There are different opinions as to which of Avraham's experiences are considered tests of his faith. Most lists of the 10 end with the Akeida, as implied by the p'sukim themselves. Rabbeinu Yona finds a test after the Akeida - Avraham's experience in providing a burial place for Sara. The question on this is obvious - What was so difficult about that, that it should qualify as a test of faith - especially after the Akeida?

Perhaps the answer lies in the fact that after the Akeida, Avraham still had a couple of difficult things to go through. Wasn't the Akeida and everything that preceded it enough? No, not finished yet. This can test a person, sometimes, more than terrible trials and tribulations, themselves.

There is another approach to answer the same question. Eulogizing his wife, acquiring a burial place, finding a "shiduch" for Yitzchak - even remarrying Hagar (Ketura) are all "regular", mundane experiences. Can one who spoke repeatedly to G-d, ascended Har HaMori'ah, had a special relationship with G-d - can such a person return to being a "normal" human being? This too is a test, and Avraham passed with flying colors.

Levi - Second Aliya - 13 p'sukim - 23:17-24:9

The field, cave, trees, etc. become the lawful property of Avraham, after which he buries Sara.

B'reishit 24 is the second longest perek in the Torah, with 67 p'sukim. Bamidbar 7 has 89 p'sukim. Bamidbar 26 has 65 p'sukim.

[S> 24:1 (67)] Avraham is now at an advanced age and has been blessed greatly by G-d. "And G-d blessed Avraham BAKOL", with everything.

The word **BAKOL** screams out for explanation. And, sure enough, there are many suggestions as to what this

extra blessing of BAKOL is. (Every time we say Birkat HaMazon, we ask G-d to bless us as He blessed our forefathers - BAKOL... Mikol and Kol are terms associated with Yitzchak and Yaakov.)

The numeric value of BAKOL is 52, the same as BEN, son. This alludes to the ultimate blessing that Avraham received - his son Yitzchak.

A gimatriya digression: BEN is 52. So is Eliyahu and Gedaliya. 52×2=104, the gimatriya of Mano'ach and Nachum (anagrams). 52×3=156, the gimatriya of Yosef and Vofsi (anagrams) and Yechezkeil. 52×4=208, gimatriya of Yitzchak, Pinchas, and Hagar. The point? Don't know. It's just interesting.

R. Meir says that Avraham was blessed by NOT having a daughter. In Avraham's time and in his unique circumstances, who would she have married? What would have happened to her? In this case it was a bracha not to have had a daughter.

On the other hand... R. Yehuda says that Avraham's extra blessing was that he DID have a daughter. There is even an opinion that his daughter's name was BAKOL.

Rabbi Eliezer HaModai says that Avraham was blessed with the art/ skill/power of astrology and that he was consulted by noblemen from far and wide.

(Even when G-d told Avraham that he would have a child, Avraham resisted because he had seen in the stars that he was not going to have children. G-d "explained" to Avraham that it is possible to rise above one's "mazal", and in fact, that is the special quality of the nation that will come from him. EIN MAZAL L'YISRAEL. Ibn Ezra says in the name of our Sages z"l, true, but only as long as we keep the Torah.)

R. Shimon bar Yochai says that Avraham had a precious stone with curative powers that would heal all who gazed upon it.

These last two opinions identify BAKOL as Avraham's prominent position in the world. This fits with his role as "father of many nations".

Some suggest that Eisav's not sinning (until after Avraham died) and Yishmael's repentance during Avraham's lifetime are the extra blessings.

Other explanations of BAKOL include that Avraham was given a preview of Olam HaBa, the World to Come; that the Angel of Death had no power over Avraham, but rather he died a MITAT N'SHIKA, died with a Divine Kiss; that worms and maggots did not attack his body in the grave.

Regardless of what explanation you like, it is clear that Avraham Avinu was special in G-d's eyes and his life of devotion to G-d and his G'milut Chasadim makes him an exemplary model for us, his descendants.

The one major task remaining, which will forge the next vital link in what promises to be a great people and a great Chain of Tradition, is finding a suitable "shidduch" for Yitzchak. Everything now will depend upon Yitzchak. However great Avraham was, unless there is "solid" continuity, all will be lost. To this end, Avraham calls upon Eliezer to swear that he will faithfully carry out his task, that he will return to Avraham's family and hometown, and find a wife for Yitzchak there. And that Yitzchak is not to leave Eretz Yisrael (having been consecrated on the Mizbei'ach at the Akeida).

Let's take a look at perek 24, its 67 p'sukim that deal with Eliezer being sent to find a suitable wife for Yitzchak. The name Avraham occurs 14 times. Sara's name, twice. Yitzchak's name occurs 8 times; Rivka's, 13 times. But the shocker is that Eliezer, a major character in this perek, is not named at all. He is referred to as HA-EVED (9 times, and three times as EVED AVRAHAM), the servant - specifically, in reference to his relationship to Avraham and his family. Nine times, he is referred to as HA-ISH, the man. This, in relation to Betu'el, Lavan, and Rivka. Of particular interesting is 24:61 - "And Rivka and her maidens arose and rode on the camels, and they followed THE MAN; and THE SERVANT took Rivka and left." In the same pasuk, Eliezer is called HA-ISH and HA-EVED. At the beginning of the pasuk, Rivka consents to go with Eliezer, the man. Once she actually goes, she becomes part of Avraham's family and Eliezer becomes the servant. And later, Rivka asks the servant about HA-ISH that she sees in the distance. This time, it is Yitzchak who is the man.

Shlishi - Third Aliya - 17 p'sukim - 24:10-26

Eliezer takes ten camels laden with a splendid assortment of goods and travels to Avraham's hometown. Upon arrival, he ties the camels up near the well (and spring), towards evening, at the time when the local girls come to draw water. He asks G-d to be kind to his master Avraham. Eliezer asks for a sign - the girl who will offer him drink and also water for his camels, she will be the one sent by G-d. Almost before he finished speaking, **Rivka b. Betu'el** of Avraham's family arrives on the scene with her water container on her shoulder. Eliezer runs to her and asks for a bit of water. She immediately gives him his fill and then draws water for his camels (an arduous task). Anxious to find out whether she was "the one", Eliezer waits until the camels have their drink and then presents Rivka with gifts of jewelry. (On the one hand, he has seen her kind nature and tireless act of chesed; on the other hand, he has not even yet asked her who she is.) When Rivka tells Eliezer that she is indeed from Avraham's family and invites him to

stay at her home, he prostrates himself before G-d in grateful acknowledgment.

R'vi'i - Fourth Aliya - 26 p'sukim - 24:27-52

Eliezer also says a blessing to G-d for not abandoning Avraham or withholding Divine Kindness from him. Rivka runs home to tell her family what has happened. Lavan, Rivka's brother, (filled with ulterior motives, our sources tell us) runs to greet Eliezer. The gold jewelry adorning Rivka catches Lavan's eye, and he "graciously" offers Eliezer hospitality. Eliezer is served food but refuses to eat until his "business" is completed.

Eliezer proceeds to tell the story of his mission. He tells of Avraham and Yitzchak and of being sent to find a wife for Yitzchak. When he asks for Rivka's hand on behalf of his master, Lavan and Betu'el (commentaries point to Lavan's pushing himself before his father as an indication of a negative personality trait) accept all as G-d's will.

Eliezer again prostrates himself before G-d in grateful acknowledgment of the success of his mission.

Chamishi - 5th Aliya - 15 p'sukim - 24:53-67

Eliezer gives more gifts to Rivka and her mother and brother, then they all celebrate with food and drink, and Eliezer and his party stay overnight. In the morning, Eliezer asks his leave. Rivka's family asks that she remain for a year, or at least ten months (as was the custom in those days) but Eliezer insists on leaving immediately (and taking Rivka with him). Rivka is consulted and she agrees to leave right away. They send her off with a "maid" (later identified as D'vora) and bless her.

This blessing has been repeated countless times to Jewish brides throughout the generations. Ironic, is it not, that we use Lavan's words for such a special occasion.

Rabbi Sholom Gold z"l speculateed as to how a girl growing up in the house of Betuel and Lavan can so quickly step into Sara Imeinu's shoes. His answer (beautifully developed in a shiur) is that it was D'vora, Rivka's nursemaid, who was her teacher and influence in the ways of Sara. D'vora was left behind when Avraham and Sara "made Aliya", for just this purpose.

Shishi - Sixth Aliya - 11 p'sukim - 25:1-11

[P> 25:1 (11)] Avraham, having successfully provided for the continuity of what will become the Jewish Nation, now lives out the remainder of his life as a "private citizen", so to speak. He takes for himself a wife named KETURA (which we are taught

was HAGAR - there are other opinions) and fathers six more children. He gives them gifts, but Yitzchak remains Avraham's exclusive spiritual heir. (We can really say that in some ways, other peoples of the world followed Avraham's lead in living monotheistic lives, but the Torah's definition of Avraham's lineage is Yitzchak.)

Some commentaries suggest that Avraham's marrying and fathering children at such a late stage in his life was his effort to realize G-d's promise that he (Avraham) would be AV HAMON GOYIM, the father of many nations.

Avraham dies at the "ripe old age" of 175 (actually, this is 5 years short of the complete 180 that Yitzchak later reached - various reasons are given for the "lost" 5 years). His was a graceful, good, and fulfilling life (despite the tough times he had). He is buried in the Cave of Machpela, where he had buried Sara. Both Yitzchak and Yishmael take care of the burial.

The Torah implies that Yishmael had repented his ways and had become righteous. What greater "nachas" for a father than that!

G-d blesses Yitzchak after Avraham's death.

Sh'VII - Seventh Aliya - 7 p'sukim - 25:12-18

[P> 25:12 (7)] The descendants of Yishmael are now enumerated. Yishmael is identified fully as the son of Avraham and Hagar the Egyptian maiden of Sara who bore Yishmael "to Avraham". (This is quite parallel to the description of Yitzchak's connection to Avraham as stated in the beginning of next week's sedra. This might further indicate Yishmael's T'shuva in his later years. On the other hand, commentaries point out that the word TOL'DOT in the Yishmael context is spelled without any VAVs, indicating a lesser status to Yishmael.) It is noteworthy that Yishmael fathered twelve sons (not like Yitzchak, but like Yaakov would later). Note that both Nachor and Yishmael had their 12 descendants way before we did. This indicates a tougher life for the Jewish people (something that has been borne out over and over again in the course of Jewish History, right up to current events).

Yishmael dies at the age of 100 and 30 and 7 years. The wording in the Torah (seems to) purposely parallels that which was used to describe Sara's lifespan, a further indication (perhaps) of the change for the better in Yishmael. We can add that Levi and Amram both lived 137 years. Significant? I don't know. But interesting.

Rashi says that the age of Yishmael is included to help us compute the chronology of Yaakov.

The last 3 p'sukim are reread for the Maftir.

Although I wrote that I don't know if the 137 connection among Yishmael, Levi, and Amram are significant, I did find mention of it in two modern sources. Rabbi Yitzchak Ginsburg sees a mystical connection in that Levi and Amram are in some way a TIKUN for Yishmael. Rabbi Yosef Carmel points out that the numeric value of the word KABBALA is 137.

Haftara - 31 p'sukim - Melachim Alef 1:1-31

The sedra tells of the aging Avraham and his task of providing for the continuity of his beliefs and G-d fearing way-of-life, through his son Yitzchak (even though there were other potential heirs). The Haftara parallels this theme by telling us of the aging King David with many potential heirs, arranging that it would be his son Shlomo who would be the next link in the Davidic line. This, fulfillment of a promise made to Shlomo's mother, Batsheva - similar to the promise made to Sara that her son would inherit. The starting points are Avraham Avinu and David HaMelech. But no matter how strong their personalities were, the chain ends with them unless the next generation is as strong as a Yitzchak Avinu and a Shlomo HaMelech.