TO-L'DOT

6th of the 54 sedras;
6th of 12 in B'reishit

Written on 172.7 lines, ranks 36th

4 Parshiyot; 2 open, 2 closed

106 p'sukim, ranks 29 (9th in B'reishit)

Tied with Vayigash and Bo;
shorter than each in words & letters and length

1432 words, ranks 34 (10th in B'rei.)

5426 letters, ranks 33 (10th in B'rei.)

Its p'sukim are below average in length

MITZVOT

None of the 613 mitzvot are in To-l'dot. However, as we mention often, there are Midot and values and other lessons to be learned.

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.

This sedra name has two syllables - TO and L'DOT, accent on the L'DOT. Not TOL-DOT or TOL-DOS. The sedra-name has 2nd highest gimatriya.

Kohen - First Aliya - 21 p'sukim - 25:19-26:5

[P> 25:19 (16)] This is the history of Yitzchak b. Avraham; Avraham fathered Yitzchak.

SDT: Rashi quotes the Gemara that tells that when Yitzchak was born, scoffers said that Avraham and Sara, who were old and childless for so long, had found a baby and claimed it as their own. Avraham invited the leaders of the nations, their wives and infants, and Sara miraculously was able to wet-nurse all the babies - not just her son Yitzchak. (The Gemara points to the plural BANIM in 21:7.) Then the scoffers accepted that Sara bore Yitzchak, but chided Avraham that Avimelech was the father (since Yitzchak's birth followed Sara's abduction). A miracle occurred and baby Yitzchak was the very image of his father Avraham, until the scoffers proclaimed, "Avraham sired Yitzchak."

Yitzchak is 40 years old when he marries Rivka (3 years after the Akeida). The Torah emphasizes Rivka's family background.

SDT: Safe to say that most of us learned from way back that Rivka was 3 years old when she married Yitzchak. This notion is based on the Torah's telling us of the birth of Rivka right after the portion of the Akeida. Yitzchak was 37 at the time of the Akeida and the death of Sara Imeinu. He married at 40, hence Rivka was 3 at the time.

However, Chizkuni (an early commentary of Torah and of Rashi) argues that if Rivka was only 3, there would be a discrepancy in the chronology of the rest of her life. We have sources that indicate she was 133 at the time of her death. Working backwards with various events, we find that she was 14 when she married Yitzchak. The account of Nachor's family - including Rivka, does not have to mean that she was just born at the time of the Akeida. The Torah is just introducing us to Rivka in order to bring her into the picture, so to speak, as Yitzchak is about to take over the mantle of Patriarch-hood from Avraham Avinu.

After 20 years of childlessness (10 until Rivka was of child-bearing age - based on the 3 year old opinion - plus an additional 10 years without a child), Yitzchak and Rivka pray to G-d. G-d hears their (actually his) prayer and Rivka becomes pregnant. She is having a "rough time" and goes to Sheim ben No'ach (who died at age 600, outliving Avraham) who tells her G-d's message, that she will give birth to twins who will go in very different ways and become great adversarial nations.

SDT: Commentaries say that Rivka was unaware that she was carrying twins; she thought the turmoil within

her existed in a single baby - THIS had her very upset; she was somewhat calmed by the Divine message of her carrying twins. Another commentator suggests that Rivka knew she'd have twins but did not see the benefit of bringing a Yaakov into this world if it meant also having an Eisav. Part of the reply to her question "why do I need this?" is that her conclusion was wrong.

Eisav and Yaakov are born, Yaakov clutching the heel of Eisav. The boys grow and develop different personalities - Eisav is the hunter and outdoorsman; Yaakov, the mild, studious "tent-dweller". Yitzchak loves Eisav; Rivka loves Yaakov.

SDT: There are many different commentaries on these relationships. Note that Yitzchak's love is based on Eisav's providing food for him (or deceiving him - based on various drashot). Rivka's love is unconditional. Pirkei Avot says that only an unconditional love will endure forever.

Yaakov is preparing a lentil stew for his father. (The Gemara tell us that this was the day that Avraham died; Yaakov was preparing a traditional mourner's meal for Yitzchak.)

Eisav returns from the field in a state of exhaustion. He asks Yaakov for some of the food. In exchange for the food (AND monetary compensation later, according to some m'forshim), Yaakov acquires the birthright, which is insignificant in Eisav's eyes, but meaningful to Yaakov.

SDT: The Vilna Gaon says, G-d forbid our father Yaakov should have taken advantage of Eisav's exhaustion to buy the B'chora for a mere portion of lentil stew and a piece of bread. Based on textual indications and the midrash in Bamidbar Rabba, the GR"A says that what happened in the text was the commitment by Eisav to sell the Birthright, the sealing of the deal with the food, and that the deal was completed later with Yaakov's paying money to Eisav.

Other commentaries provide different details to flesh out this episode.

[P> 26:1 (33)] A famine hits the Land (like the one in Avraham's time - this is one of the many similarities between the lives of Avraham and Yitzchak) and Yitzchak goes to Avimelech in Gerar. G-d appears to Yitzchak and reminds him that he must not leave the Land. G-d also repeats his promises of the Land and of the large nation that will descend from him.

Levi - Second Aliya - 7 p'sukim - 26:6-12

Yitzchak dwells in Gerar.

Yitzchak and Rivka pose as brother and sister (as did Avraham and Sara, and for the same reason). After a while, Avimelech discovers that they

are actually husband and wife and complains to Yitzchak about the deception. Avimelech orders his people to leave Yitzchak and Rivka alone. Yitzchak and family flourish in Gerar and G-d blesses them.

Shlishi - Third Aliya - 10 p'sukim - 26:13-22

Yitzchak thrives in Gerar, which creates jealousy among the locals who fill in the wells that Yitzchak has dug.

(There is great symbolism in the Torah's account of the wells, their names, their failures, and then their successes.) Yitzchak is driven away from Gerar. A new well that Yitzchak digs (Eisek) is taken over by the shepherds of Gerar, as is yet another well (Sitna). Only the third well (Rechovot) permits Yitzchak to live in relative peace.

SDT: Some see this as a hidden reference to the 1st and 2nd Beit HaMikdash, which fell, and the 3rd which will stand forever. May we see it soon in our time.

R'vi'i - Fourth Aliya - 7 p'sukim - 26:23-29

Yitzchak moves and sets himself up in Be'er Sheva. G-d appears to him and reiterates the promises for prosperity made to Avraham. Yitzchak builds an altar to G-d and continues to prosper. Avimelech, realizing that his own prosperity was due to the presence of Yitzchak, comes with a delegation to Yitzchak in order to enter into a covenant with him.

Not a rare experience through the centuries - Jews expelled from a country, which subsequently regrets its actions because of the decline they experienced without them. And we, somehow, kept going back.

Chamishi - 5th Aliya - 33 p'sukim - 26:30-27:27

Yitzchak and Avimelech partake of a meal and exchange oaths. Be'er Sheva is reaffirmed as "the city of the Avot" by Yitzchak's actions. Another example of the similarity between Yitzchak's life and Avraham's.

[S> 26:34 (2)] Eisav marries at 40 years of age - a (sub)conscious attempt to emulate his father. However wicked Eisav is, he is genuinely respectful and loving of his father. On the other hand, Eisav's choice of a wife disgusts both Yitzchak and Rivka.

[S> 27:1 (55)] Yitzchak is old and blind and calls Eisav to prepare for him a special meal and then receive a special blessing. While Eisav is in the fields doing his father's bidding, Rivka prepares Yaakov to receive the blessing instead of Eisav. She tells Yaakov to bring her two goats and she will prepare the dishes that Yitzchak loves. Yaakov hesitates for fear that Yitzchak will feel his smooth skin and

realize that Yaakov has come to deceive him. Rivka dresses Yaakov in Eisav's garments and places a goat-skin on his arms and neck to give it a rough feel. She gives Yaakov the food to bring to his father.

SDT: It seems obvious that Yaakov was punished measure for measure for his deception of Yitzchak. The Brothers not only deceived Yaakov concerning the fate of Yosef, but they used a goat and a garment (exactly the two items that Yaakov used to deceive his father) to bring about their deception. If we accept the idea that Yaakov was supposed to get the bracha that Yitzchak thought he was going to give to Eisav, that it was G-d's will, and even G-d's command, according to Onkeles, to Rivka to "set it up", then why was Yaakov punished so severely?

An answer might be suggested in the form of an analogy. When one has to take drastic, life-saving treatments - "serious" medication, radiation, etc., what is done might be absolutely necessary, but there are often harsh side-effects.

SDT: When the Torah tells us that Yaakov gave his father wine to drink, the TROP note under the word LO (to him) is a MEIRCHA CH'FULA, double meircha. This rare note (only 5 times in the Torah), suggests the Meshech Chochma, reminds us of the proper way to drink a cup of wine - not gulping it down in one shot, but rather finishing it in two "installments". It's more polite that way.

Shishi - Sixth Aliya - 23 p'sukim - 27:28-28:4

The blessing invoked by Yitzchak upon Yaakov, for bountiful produce and respected status among nations, has been borrowed by us to be recited on Motza'ei Shabbat -

V'YITEN L'CHA HA-ELOKIM... 'May G-d grant you the dew of heaven and the fat of the earth, much grain and wine. Nations will serve you; governments will bow down to you. You shall be like a lord over your brother; your mother's children will prostrate themselves to you. Those who curse you are cursed, and those who bless you are blessed.'

As Yitzchak finishes blessing Yaakov, Eisav returns from the hunt. He prepares food for his father and presents it with a request (demand) of the blessing. Yitzchak trembles greatly when he realizes that the bracha went to Yaakov. When Yitzchak explains to Eisav that Yaakov received (rightly so) the blessing, Eisav bitterly cries out and asks his father for a blessing too. Yitzchak gives Eisav a blessing (not as exalted as Yaakov's). Eisav plans to kill Yaakov for this, the second time he has taken something away from him. Rivka hears (how? Ru'ach HaKodesh, says Rashi) of Eisav's plans and

encourages Yaakov to flee to Rivka's hometown until Eisav's wrath subsides. Rivka suggests to Yitzchak that he send Yaakov away to find a proper wife.

Note that Rivka did NOT tell Yitzchak that Eisav wanted to kill Yaakov. Perhaps she felt that it would pain him too much to learn of Eisav's true character. Perhaps, Yitzchak would have refused to believe that his Eisav would contemplate such a thing. Instead, Rivka expresses another (legitimate) concern as her reason for wanting Yitzchak to send Yaakov away.

Yitzchak calls for Yaakov and blesses him again and sends him off to Padan Aram to find a wife from Rivka's family. He gives Yaakov "the blessing of Avraham", thus providing for the continuity of what becomes The Jewish People.

SDT: Once again, we see that it is the IMA who understands what is going on, and the ABBA who is 'blinded' by his love.

Avraham loved his son Yishmael and balked at Sara's demand that he banish Yishmael and Hagar because of the potential negative influence on Yitzchak and because of actual misdeeds by Yishmael to Yitzchak.

Now it is Yitzchak who is 'blinded' by his love of Eisav, to Eisav's real character. Rivka Imeinu is the one - guided by G-d - who acts to secure the b'racha for Yaakov.

And it doesn't end here. It happens in the next generation, and beyond. Stay tuned for further details as we proceed from sedra to sedra.

Sh'VII - Seventh Aliya - 5 p'sukim - 28:5-9

Yitzchak sends Yaakov off to Padan Aram to Lavan b. B'tu'el, the brother of Rivka who is the mother of Yaakov and Eisav. **(Unusual ID.)** Eisav sees that their father has sent Yaakov to find a wife, because he does not want him to take a Canaanite wife. Yaakov goes on his way and Eisav takes as another wife, the daughter of Yishmael, Machalat b. Yishmael...

Talmud Yerushalmi explains that this is ba-S'MAT (not BAS-mat - another to-L'DOT example of incorrect pronunciation), and asks why her name was changed. The astonishing answer is that all Eisav's sins were forgiven when he took a wife intended to please his parents. The Talmud generalizes and gives this as the source that the sins of a CHATAN (and KALLA) are forgiven when they marry. This is the basis of Chatan & Kalla fasting on the day of their wedding and of adding the Yom Kippur vidui to their Mincha Amida. Strange source for a significant concept.

Does She or Doesn't She?

Remember that commercial? Doesn't matter; it has nothing to do with this.

Was Rivka a prophetess? Seems not. She is not on the list of the Seven Prophetesses (and 48 Prophets). They are Sara, Miriam, Devora, Chana, Avigayil, Chulda, and Esther.

At the beginning of the sedra, Rivka goes LIDROSH ET HASHEM. We are told that she went to SHEIM to consult with G-d about the turmoil she was feeling inside of her. The pasuk says VAYOMER HASHEM LAH - G-d said to her. Rashi is quick to add that G-d spoke to her via SHEIM, indicating that Rivka was not on the level of receiving communication directly from G-d.

And yet, Later in the sedra, when Yaakov hesitates to do as Rivka instructs him - bringing the food she prepared to Yitzchak and to receive the blessing instead of Eisav - she says, ALAI... upon me will be the curse, just do as I say. Targum Onkelos adds a crucial phrase to ALAI - he says, ALAI, to me, IT-AMAR BINVU'A, it was said in prophecy (that this is what you should be doing).

And further on, when Eisav says in his heart, to himself, that he will kill Yaakov, the Torah says that Rivka was told of Eisav's intention - VAYUGAD L'RIVKA ET DIVREI EISAV, Rashi says that she was told with Ru'ach HaKodesh, with (sort of) prophecy.

So, is she or isn't she?

The answer seems to be somewhere in between. RU'ACH HAKODESH. The Sacred Spirit. Divine inspiration. This is what Rivka had. Let's say that it is a notch or so below prophecy.

Or we can suggest that prophecy is some kind of message or instruction that G-d transmits to people via a prophet. Rivka's situation doesn't fit that definition.

Haftara - 21 p'sukim - Mal-achi 1:1-2:7

There is speculation as to whether Mal-achi is the name of an individual, or a description of "My messenger". Some say that Mal-achi was Ezra. Mal-achi is known as the last of the prophets. And the book of Mal-achi is the last booklet of Trei Asar and the last book of the Nevi'im section of Tanach.

Mal-achi brings G-d's message to the people that He loves Yaakov (and his descendants), and hates Eisav, even though Yaakov and Eisav are brothers. Thus, the haftara echoes the rivalry and relationship between the two brothers that is the substance of the sedra To-l'dot. The haftara refers to the respect a son has for his father. In this regard, Eisav was exemplary.

Mal'achi criticizes the kohanim of the time for not being careful in the

offering of korbanot. We can see this as a preparation for the building of the new Beit HaMikdash in the hopes that it will function properly and be a true honor to G-d.