VAYISHLACH

8th of 54 sedras;
8th of 12 in B'reishit

Written on 237 lines; rank 11th

9 Parshiyot - 6 P'tuchot; 3 S'tumot

153 p'sukim - 4th (1st in B'reishit), tied with No'ach, but more words and letters than No'ach

1976 words - 6th (4th in B'reishit)

7458 letters - 6th (4th in B'reishit)

Drop in rank for words and letters due to its p'sukim being well below average in number of words and letters (but not as low as No'ach). IOW, Vayishlach has many - but relatively short p'sukim

MITZVOT

One mitzva in Vayishlach,
one of 3 in the Book of B'reishit.
The only prohibition of the Torah's 365 in B'reishit - Gid HaNasheh

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 (positive mitzva); L=LAV (prohibition). X:Y is perek & pasuk from which the mitzva comes.

Kohen - First Aliya - 10 p'sukim - 32:4-13

[P> 32:4 (47)] Yaakov sends messengers to his brother Eisav with a message of conciliation (and warning?).

SDT: Onkelos considers that the messengers that Yaakov sent, were human (IZGADIN are runners or messengers); Rashi states that the word MAL'ACHIM is to be taken literally, as heavenly angels. Commentaries point to the end of last week's sedra, with Yaakov's encountering the "camps" of angels upon his return to Eretz Yisrael, as support for Rashi's point of view. Bartenura further explains that Biblical references to angels always include something they said or a prophetic message. When Yaakov encountered the angels, nothing is said. It could be argued, that the Torah mentioned the angels in connection with Yaakov's sending them to Eisav. Other commentaries say that Yaakov sent angels because humans might be affected by Eisav and angels would be able to "read" the situation accurately. One Chassidic Master put it this way: When a Jew is facing a threat from an Eisav-type and needs help, he may even bother heavenly angels for their support.

Rabbeinu Bechaye says that Yaakov sent both - heavenly angels first to

make it clear to Eisav that he has to 'behave' and accept the humans whom Yaakov sent with the gifts of animals.

SDT: One of Yaakov's statements was that he had been living with Lavan and was delayed until now. Rashi learns, that "he lived with Lavan but did not learn from his evil ways." Some see this as a compliment to Yaakov, that he was able to maintain his complete adherence to Torah values in such an alien atmosphere. Others see an implied criticism: All those years in Lavan's home, and he did not learn from Lavan's evil ways... how to channel the cunning and enthusiasm he witnessed in Lavan, towards his (Yaakov's) own service of G-d. There are lessons to be learned even by negative example.

Yaakov announces to Eisav that he has "oxen, donkeys, sheep, and servants".

SDT: Why does Yaakov tell this to Eisav? Is he boasting about wealth that he has amassed in Lavan's house? No, just the opposite. Yaakov is telling Eisav that although he has much material wealth and large flocks and herds, he does not have land. He has not (yet) benefited from the blessing (that Eisav felt should have been his) of "from the dew of the heavens and the fertility of the ground..." Therefore, Yaakov hoped that Eisav would not be angry with him.

The report of Eisav's pending arrival with 400 men prompts Yaakov into three modes of action. He first divides his camp into two, so that one will be able to escape if the other is attacked. Then he prays to G-d for His help and the fulfillment of promises made. (the third phase is in the next portion.)

SDT: Commentaries point out that Yaakov asks G-d to save him "from my brother - from Eisav". This is not a redundancy. The Jew faces two enemies: The Eisavs of the world who would destroy the Jewish people, and the "friendly brothers" who would gladly permit us to assimilate into their cultures - thereby also bringing about the destruction of the Jewish People. Yaakov prays for salvation from both threats.

Similarly, in the very first pasuk of the sedra, Yaakov sends the angels (or messengers) to his BROTHER EISAV. Yaakov is always aware that Eisav is both, and he must be weary of both persona. The Beit HaLevi puts it this way. Danger #1 is war. Danger #2 is a peace treaty with Eisav that can also be disastrous. Does this say anything to us today?

Levi - Second Aliya - 17 p'sukim - 32:14-30

Yaakov next prepares elaborate gifts from his flocks and herds for Eisav to be delivered with a goodwill message of appeasement.

SDT: The Baal HaTurim points out that there are two p'sukim in the Torah in which every word ends with a "final MEM". Here in Vayishlach (32:15, eight words) - 200 nanny-goats, 20 billy-goats... and Bamidbar (29:33, seven words). And their (referring to sacrifices) flour-oil offerings, their wine of libation, for the oxen... Is there a connection? Baal HaTurim shares an amazing calculation with us. Yaakov sent 550 animals as an appeasement to Eisav, even though G-d had assured him that He would protect him. Yaakov's descendants were destined to offer 550 animals per year as Musaf sacrifices.

Ed. note: The number of Shabbatot in a year vary from 50-55; Rosh Chodeshes can be 12 or 13. Chagim are the same for all years. Animals of Chagim Musaf total 307. Shabbat Musaf will add 100-110; R"Ch adds 132-143. Totals therefore range from 539 to 560 with an average somewhere around 550, as the Baal HaTurim says.

He instructs his servants what to say when they meet up with Eisav.

During the night before his encounter with Eisav, Yaakov finds himself alone. **(One of the sources that a person should not go out alone at night.)**

SDT: Commentaries tell us that Yaakov returned across the Yabok to retrieve small flasks of oil that had been left behind. Some say this was the oil with which he anointed the altar and monuments, and that this flask of oil was the antecedent of the sole flask of oil found by the Chash-mona'im centuries later. (Take this literally or figuratively - as you wish. The connection is still there.)

Yaakov battles with an ISH (literally a "man", whom we are taught is the guardian angel of Eisav). Yaakov prevails in this struggle but is injured. He receives an unusual blessing from the angel in the form of an additional name - Yisrael.

SDT: Yaakov asks the angel who has wrestled with him to give him a bracha. Rashi says that he was asking that the angel acknowledge the brachot that Yaakov had received from Yitzchak, one of which, Yitzchak had originally intended to give to Eisav. Perhaps what prompts Rashi to this explanation rather than the situation being simply that Yaakov was asking for a new bracha, is the unusual word BEI-RACH-TANI (which relates to the past) and not BOR'CHEINI (bless me now).

Some say that the ISH he wrestled with was himself, reflecting the inner turmoil and mixed feelings he had about his "history" with Eisav.

Note that the angel does not declare that Yaakov will no longer be his name, but rather Yisrael. He does say that it will no longer be said that he is

a "Yaakov" (one who holds onto his brother's heel to hold him back) but rather he will be referred to as Yisrael, the one who prevailed before G-d and man.

Unlike Avraham, whose previous name is no longer used after he is renamed Avraham, Yaakov carries both names. In fact, the second word after the angel's declaration of the new name is... Yaakov. Similarly, when G-d confirms the name Yisrael upon Yaakov, he (Yaakov) is still called Yaakov, and sometimes Yisrael. This is the flavor of Rashi's commentary on LO YAAKOV, which he explains: People will no longer call you "the one who held your brother back", but they will acknowledge you as having justly prevailed.

Shlishi - Third Aliya - 8 p'sukim - 32:31-33:5

MITZVA NOTES

The perennial battle between Eisav and Yaakov, which this battle typifies, is "commemorated" by the prohibition of GID HANASHEH [3, L183 32:33]. Even though the Torah introduces this mitzva in the context of the story here in B'reishit, the mitzva is part of the Revelation at Sinai, as if it would have said (later in the Torah): "And G-d spoke to Moshe saying - command the People not to eat the Gid HaNasheh..." (or words to that effect). The only "negative" mitzva in the book of B'reishit is this prohibition against eating the "Gid HaNasheh". Removal of the "gid" and its innervating branches in the thigh and leg of the animal, as well as the fats and flesh in the area, is required, and difficult. Further problems result from blood vessels that must be removed from that part of the animal's body. The process of removal of the GID and other vessels is known as NIKUR (Hebrew) or "treibering" (Yiddish/English). It is, in most cases, not economically feasible to remove the "gid". The whole hind section of the animal is generally sold as non-kosher (thereby removing the GID from the rest of the animal's body). This is the common practice in the U.S. In Israel, however, where there is not so readily available a non-kosher market, NIKUR is more common. This means that some fancy hind cuts of meat can (and might) be available to the kosher consumer in Israel (a perk of Aliya?), such as Tenderloin, Sirloin, Porter-house, T-bone.

The Rambam in his commentary on Mishna, emphasizes the point about this mitzva being part of Revelation at Sinai and not the result of a family decision following the episode of Yaakov's battle with the Sar shel Eisav. The mishna in Chulin (7:6) presents a dispute as to whether the prohibition of Gid HaNasheh applies

only to kosher mammals or to non-kosher ones, as well. Rabbi Yehuda - whose opinion we do NOT accept - is that the mitzva also applies to non-kosher animals because at the time of the event recorded in Vayishlach, there was not yet a prohibition of eating meat of non-kosher animals. Since the prohibition of the Gid predates Sinai - says Rabbi Yehuda, it would apply to non-kosher animals too. The Tana Kama, in maintaining that the prohibition applies only to kosher animals stresses the point - which the Rambam declares as a major principle of Torah Law - that the isur of Gid is part of the body of mitzvot from Matan Torah and was placed in Vayishlach to give it the context of the story, so that we will always remember that though we face many attacks from the Eisavs of the world throughout the generations, and though we are often bloodied by those attacks - yet we will always survive them and continue until (and beyond) the 'rising of the sun of Mashiach' and the Complete Geula, when our troubles with Eisav will end. BIMHEIRA V'YAMEINU...

Yaakov sees Eisav and his men coming; he pushes his family behind him and repeatedly bows to his brother. Eisav runs towards him embraces him, k*i*s*s*e*s* him, and they weep.

SDT: Mishlei 24:16 says: For a righteous person will fall seven times and rise up... Baal HaTurim relates this pasuk to Yaakov's bowing 7 times before Eisav.

Finally, Yaakov and Eisav - brothers, twins! - are face to face, and Eisav runs towards Yaakov and embraces him, hugs him, and kisses him. Asterisks on the word VAYISHAKEI-HU. Specifically, dots are written above each letter of the word in a Torah scroll. The Scribal minhag is calling our attention to something important. A message we dare not overlook or ignore. Rashi presents us with two opinions: The dots tell us that the kiss was not sincere because of Eisav's hatred... or (says Rabi Shimon bar Yochai), even though Eisav hates Yaakov, at this moment he was overcome by genuine feelings of brotherly love and kissed him with all his heart. Note that both opinions accept the fact of life of the eternal hatred of the Eisavs of the world for the Yaakovs (us) - they just dispute this particular kiss.

Eisav asks about the women and children and Yaakov prepares to introduce his family to Eisav.

R'vi'i - Fourth Aliya - 15 p'sukim - 33:6-20

Yaakov humbles (humiliates?) himself before Eisav as he presents his family to him, all of whom bow to Eisav. Yaakov presented his wives and 11 children.

SDT: Binyamin was not yet born, but Dina was. Why did Yaakov hide Dina from Eisav? Some explain that Yaakov did not want Eisav to take Dina as a wife and thereby expose her to his wickedness. For this, Yaakov was punished, because Dina might have been (probably would have been?) a positive influence in Eisav's life. (The very next portion of the Torah tells us of the kidnap and rape of Dina and the subsequent debacle of the revenge exacted by Shimon and Levi.) Commentaries ask whether Yaakov should be praised, rather than punished, for protecting Dina.

Bartenura says that Yaakov's reason for hiding Dina was not the fear of anything negative happening to her, but the fear that she would succeed in reforming Eisav, which would make him worthy of the blessing that he would dominate his brother.

Eisav asks about the groups of animals that he met on his way. Eisav at first refuses to accept the gifts, but eventually takes them. Then Eisav suggests that he and Yaakov join together. Yaakov adamantly refuses.

NOTE Well: At first, Yaakov seems to want to avoid antagonizing Eisav, even to the point of humbling (humiliating?) himself before his brother. However, when the possibility of subjecting his family to the influences of Eisav is at issue, Yaakov boldly risks confrontation. Strong lesson for us to learn well. When we would be weaker and vulnerable, it would be folly to agree.

[S> 33:18 (3)] Yaakov travels to the Sh'chem area where he purchases land (for 100 k'sita) and builds a Mizbei'ach.

The land that Yaakov purchased was used many years later for the burial of Yosef's remains.

Chamishi - 5th Aliya - 42 p'sukim - 34:1-35:11

Longest Chamishi in the Torah. One of only 9 aliyot (out of 378 in the Torah) with 40 or more p'sukim

[S> 34:1 (31)] Dina (who had been hidden from Eisav) now goes out to explore the "local attractions". She is kidnapped and raped by Sh'chem who then falls in love with her. His father (Chamor) proposes an alliance with Yaakov's family for the purpose of intermarriage and fusing of their cultures. Shimon and Levi trick Sh'chem and his people into circumcising themselves. When the people are weakened, Shimon and Levi kill them to avenge what was done to Dina. Yaakov is upset at what they have done (perhaps not - some commentaries say, he was upset at not being consulted in the first place), but they defend their actions.

[P> 35:1 (8)] G-d tells Yaakov to move to Beit-El and build an altar there. Yaakov rids his household of idols. G-d

prevents the locals from pursuing Yaakov and family to avenge the killing of the people of Sh'chem.

Rivka's nurse Devora dies and is buried. (There is a Tradition that Rivka died at this point too. Some suggest that the Torah was silent about Rivka's death because Yaakov was not around to tend to her burial, only Eisav was.)

Who was D'vora, the nursemaid of Rivka? Why does she rate mention? Why is her death mentioned?

It has been suggested that she was one of Avraham and Sara's 'converts', but that they purposely did not take her when they went to Eretz Yisrael, with 'the souls they made in Charan'. Rather, they left her as a tutor for Rivka, someone to teach her and influence her to become worthy and fitting to be Yitzchak's wife and a Matriarch of the Jewish People.

[P> 35:9 (14)] G-d appears once again to Yaakov and blesses him. He confirms the new name Yisrael (which is used alongside the name Yaakov, each name having different connotations).

Shishi - Sixth Aliya - 37 p'sukim - 35:12-36:19

G-d reiterates His promise of the Land to Yaakov and his descendants. Yaakov erects another monument to mark the place at which G-d appeared to him. Rachel gives birth to Binyamin (11th of Marcheshvan) and dies in childbirth. She thanks G-d with her dying breath for her having a second son. She is buried on the "road to Efrata" and her burial place is marked "even unto this day".

Reuven **UNTRANSLATED** Bilha, his father's pilegesh, and Yaakov heard

SDT: The Gemara states: Anyone who thinks that Reuven actually slept with Bilha, as the literal translation of the pasuk would indicate, is grossly mistaken. Some say that Reuven moved Yaakov's bed from the tent of Bilha - where Yaakov had placed it after Rachel's death - into his mother's (Leah's) tent. The Torah's cryptic description of what he did is considered a sharp rebuke of his actions, which were disrespectful to his father. Nonetheless, he was motivated by protective jealousy for his mother Leah. The Mishna states that when the Torah was translated into Aramaic during public Torah reading, this pasuk was not translated. It was read, but it was left without TIRGUM so as not to mislead and confuse the people. This is a glaring example (of which there are many more, as well as subtle ones) of the inability to understand the Written Word without its inseparable partner, the Oral Torah. This is so for 'story' parts of the Torah, as well as Halachic texts. This is the tragedy of the nations of the world (and of some Jews) clutching their bibles and

thinking that they hold in their hands the Word of G-d. They hold only part of the Word of G-d which is so easily misunderstood and perverted in the absence of its Oral partner.

[P> 35:23 (7)] ...the sons of Yaakov are 12.

SDT: This statement is part of the same pasuk (although it begins a new parsha) as the statement about Reuven's deed. This is considered proof of the Talmudic statement mentioned above. Had Reuven actually sinned in the literal sense of the pasuk, he would not immediately be acknowledged as one of the sons of Yaakov, he would have been ostracized, or worse. Additionally, he is identified as Yaakov's B'CHOR in the very next pasuk.

Yaakov's sons are enumerated. They are grouped according to mothers. Leah had Yaakov's b'chor Reuven, Shimon, Levi, Yehuda, Yissachar, Z'vulun. Rachel's sons, Yosef and Binyamin. Rachel's handmaiden Bilha - Dan and Naftali. Leah's handmaiden Zilpa - Gad and Asher. Yaakov returns to his father's home. Yitzchak dies at age 180 and is buried by Eisav and Yaakov.

[P> 36:1 (19)] Eisav's descendants are enumerated. Note well that the Torah spends 30 p'sukim on the family tree of Eisav and Sei'ir with whom they sort of merged. That is a lot!

The fact that this is done at this point in the Torah, before the Torah continues with the accounts of the family of Yaakov seems to say: Let's finish up with Eisav first, before we continue with the important line of descent. Eisav is a force in this world, but he is not the reason for its existence.

Another reason: It might serve as a rebuke for Yaakov's humbling himself before Eisav. Call him your master and you his servant, says G-d, then I will establish him and his line of royalty in their own land many years before you and your descendants are ready for nationhood and their own kings.

Sh'VII - Seventh Aliya - 24 p'sukim - 36:20-43

[S> 36:20 (11)] The Torah continues with the descendants of Se'ir the Chori. These are people who lived in Edom before Eisav's clan received it. Eisav married Oholivama of Se'ir and Eisav's eldest son Elifaz took as a concubine, Timna from Se'ir. Eisav 'had a life' in Canaan, and then when the clan moved to Se'ir, there are other wives and sons who become family heads.

[P> 36:31 (13)] Finally, the Torah enumerates the kings that ruled the city-states of Eisav/Edom/Se'ir, "even before there ruled a king in Israel". Israel must still go through many stages of refinement and pass through

many trials and tribulations before they are to emerge as The People of Israel.

Haftara - 21 p'sukim - Book(let) of Ovadya

The ongoing battle between Yaakov and Eisav is the main theme of the prophecy of Ovadya. The prophecy focuses on the ultimate judgment that Eisav's descendants face; G-d will emerge as the true King of all. The Haftara "answers" the question raised in the sedra as to what are the real feelings of Eisav to Yaakov.

We say the last pasuk of Ovadya immediately following Shirat HaYam in P'sukei d'Zimra every day.