

B'shalach-Shira

16th of 54 sedras;
4th of 11 in Sh'mot



Written on 215.33 lines (17th)

14 parshiot; 9 open, 5 closed

116 p'sukim - rank: 23 (6th in Sh'mot)

1681 words - rank: 19 (4th in Sh'mot)

6423 letters - rank: 18 (4th in Sh'mot)

Higher ranking for lines is definitely due to the format of the SHIRA column, which has a lot of blank space.

MITZVOT

B'SHALACH contains a single mitzva of the 613, the prohibition of leaving one's Shabbat boundary - T'CHUM SHABBAT (T'chum's membership in the family of Torah mitzvot is disputed - see further)

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.

Remember to take a bird to lunch this Friday - HAKARAT HATOV see CALnotes for details



Kohen - First Aliya - 14 p'sukim - 13:17-14:8

[S> 13:17 (6)] "When Par'o sends the People...", G-d leads them along a circuitous route to prevent them from panicking and returning to Egypt. Moshe, in fulfillment of the promise made to Yosef by his brothers, takes Yosef's remains out of Egypt with the People.

SDT: Our Tradition is that the remains of all of the sons of Yaakov were brought out of Egypt. Why was Moshe, from the tribe of Levi, the one who took care of ATZMOT YOSEF? It has been suggested that Moshe was atoning for and effecting a TIKUN for his great-grandfather's role in the Sale of Yosef.

(Heard from Rabbi Jeff Bienenfeld)

G-d provided an escort for the People in the form of a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire at night.

[P> 14:1 (14)] G-d tells Moshe of His plan to lead the People in such a way that Par'o will pursue them in the misguided hope of bringing them back to Egypt.

When Par'o is notified (by spies whom he had sent to accompany the Israelites) of the People's whereabouts, he (with G-d's help in making his heart "heavy", i.e. strong) takes a potent force with him and chases after the People of Israel.

SDT: "And G-d did not allow them

to go DERECH ERETZ P' LISHTIM. Literally, they did not take the straight route to the territory of the Philistines. One commentator suggests an interesting DRASH based on a play on words. G-d did not take the People out of Egypt in DERECH ERETZ, in the normal, natural way of things, but in a miraculous way. Normally, bread comes from the ground; for the People of Israel, G-d sent them bread from above. Normally, water comes from above; for the People of Israel, G-d provided water from below, from a rock and from the miraculous Well that accompanied them on their journey, in the merit of Miriam. Not taking us out in a natural manner, leaves us with no doubt that it was indeed G-d Who took us out of Egypt. This is a crucial foundation stone of Judaism. Not only did we get out of Mitzrayim, but it was G-d Who took us out. Not only did He take us out, but the people knew and know it well.

G-d's opening words at Sinai make the point abundantly clear.

Levi - Second Aliya - 6 p'sukim - 14:9-14

The mighty Egyptian army pursues the People. When the People of Israel see them coming, they are greatly frightened because there is no place to flee. They complain to Moshe that it would have been better to have died in Egypt. Moshe reassures the People, encourages them not to fear, promises

them that G-d will fight on their behalf, and tells them that Egypt will soon cease to exist.

SDT: It seems that Par'o actually thought that he let the People go - that he expelled the People from Egypt. That's even what it seems to say at the beginning of this week's sedra (When Par'o sent the people out...). G-d arranged to have Par'o run after them. Then the events make it crystal clear to him - and to us - that G-d, and only G-d took us out of Egypt. Without this part of the Exodus process, Par'o and his people - and probably some Jews as well - would think that Par'o had a part in letting us leave Egypt. With the opening statement of the Aseret HaDibrot stating, I am HaShem, your G-d, Who took you out of Mitzrayim... this point is essential.

Sh'lishi - 3rd Aliya - 11 p'sukim - 14:15-25

[P> 14:15 (11)] G-d "asks" Moshe why the People are screaming; let them just move on.

SDT: Our Sages teach us that there are times when prayer is called for, and other times when action is the order of the day. G-d says: MA TITZ'AK EILAI, why cry out to Me? MA is spelled MEM-HEI. MEM can represent the 40 days and 40 nights that Moshe was to spend in prayer on behalf of the People following the Sin of the Golden Calf.

MEM represents long prayer. HEI can stand for the simple but eloquent 5-word prayer for Miriam's recovery from Tzora'at which she contracted in punishment for speaking disrespectfully of Moshe - KEIL NA R'FA NA LAH. And sometimes, neither short nor long prayer is appropriate. At this point of the Exodus, the order of the day was decisive action. Move it! We must know when to pray and when to act first, and when to do both.

G-d tells Moshe to raise his hand over the Sea and split it, so the People will be able to pass through it on dry land. G-d informs Moshe that He will again harden Egypt's heart so that they will continue their pursuit. The Egyptians will finally know G-d's Might. The guardian angel (pillar of cloud) that was leading the People now was repositioned between the Jews and the Egyptian army, preventing contact.

Moshe raises his hand above the Sea and G-d causes a powerful easterly wind to blow all night, followed by a parting of the waters. The People of Israel enter the Sea on dry land, between walls of water.

Egypt boldly follows, but their arrogant attitude abruptly changes to fear and panic as their chariots lose their wheels and bog down in the seabed. (This is in sharp contrast with the perfectly dry land beneath the feet of Israel.)

Egypt finally (too late) acknowledges

G-d, not only now, but retroactively, as the One Who had fought for Israel in Egypt.

SDT: Why the strong wind blowing all night? Could not G-d have split the Sea with the proverbial snap of a finger? The answer is: Of course He could. But the night's preparation for the miracles of the day serves several purposes. Egypt is lulled into a false sense of security when something is happening that they can explain. They don't want to accept the idea that the G-d of Israel is performing miracles for His people. No doubt, their wizards (call them meteorologists, this time) explained the desert winds and the effects it can have. Among the Jews, there are always individuals who would like not to admit to G-d's awesome powers. They too will have their "excuse" in the natural components of the miracle. Perhaps, most importantly, this wind (and the like) allows us to relate to and better appreciate, the miracles themselves. A snap of the finger brings results too quickly for us to think about what is happening. A night to ponder what was going on, further enhanced the appreciation of the Children of Israel for what had happened, was happening, and was to happen - what and when! Mixing the natural with the supernatural will often enhance the miracle by allowing us to relate to it better.

R'vi'i - Fourth Aliya - 32 p'sukim - 14:26-15:26

[P> 14:26 (6)] Moshe is now instructed by G-d to raise his hand once more over the Sea so that the waters may return. He does so and the Egyptians are drowned. The People, however, have succeeded in passing through the Sea and are ecstatic in their salvation. They attain true belief and trust in G-d and in Moshe His servant.

SDT: Rambam states that complete, solid, lasting faith in G-d was attained at Sinai. Here we must say that the belief was great, but not yet permanent. One telling hint towards the tenuousness of belief as a result of "flashy" miracles alone is the word UVMOSHE - they believed in G-d AND IN MOSHE His servant. The only other occurrence of that word UVMOSHE is in Bamidbar after Aharon dies and there was a battle against Emori, the people were disgusted with their wandering and spoke against G-d and Moshe. That's the other extreme of belief - same word occurs at both extremes.

[P> 15:1 (19)] Next comes the Song of the Sea. What makes the Song of the Sea so special is that it is a direct quote of the People of Israel that G-d put into His Torah, verbatim. In other words, the rest of the Torah is written by G-d; we composed this part. It is an inspiring passage that has been incorporated into our daily prayer.

This 19-pasuk parsha is unique in the way it is written in a Sefer Torah. The column that contains the Shira is wider than all the other columns in the Torah. It is a Tradition to start the column with 5 lines belonging to the previous parsha, beginning with the word HABA'IM. Then a line is left blank and then the first line of AZ YASHIR is written all the way across the column. The next line has one word, a blank space, a group of words (from 3-5), another blank space, and then a single word to end the line. Call this, line pattern A. The next line starts with a group of words (2-5), a space, and another group of words (3-5). Call this, line pattern B. After the first line, the rest of the Shira parsha consists of another 29 lines, alternating patterns A and B, ending with an A. Then a line is skipped. Five more "regular" lines of Torah text finish off the column. The column with the Shira has many blank spaces and two blank lines.

[P> 15:20 (2)] Following the Shira portion is a 2-pasuk parsha describing Miriam's rallying of the women to join in the Shira in their own way.

[S> 15:22 (5)] The People continue their journey and fail to find water for three days. When they do find some, they complain bitterly (PI) of the inability to drink it. G-d directs Moshe to perform a miracle by throwing a special piece of wood into the water whereby the water becomes sweet.

SDT: Aside from the literal meaning of the text, this episode is considered an allusion to the primacy of Torah in the life of a Jew. Both Torah and water sustain life - spiritual and physical. In the same vein, "3 days without water" resulted in the practice of our reading Torah on Monday and Thursday, so that in our wandering in the spiritual desert of life, we will not go 3 days without spiritual water. This is but one "use" of the analogy between Torah and water. This idea is not just a matter of DRASH. The parsha's last pasuk tells that if we will harken to G-d's Voice and follow the Torah, keep the mitzvot... then all the ills that befell Egypt will not be put upon us...

Chamishi 5th Aliya - 11 p'sukim - 15:27-16:10

[S> 15:27 (4)] The People next travel to Eilim and from there to Midbar Tsin, en route to Sinai. This time, they complain about the lack of food.

[S> 16:4 (7)] G-d tells Moshe about the manna (mahn) which He will soon provide for the People. Moshe tells the People that they will soon see how G-d hears and listens to their complaints. Mahn is not just the food that sustains the people, it is also a crucial test of the faith that the people should have in G-d. (We find Moshe reiterating this aspect of the Mahn in Parshat Eikev.) The Mahn was to fall daily except for Shabbat, and was not

allowed to be left over night (except for what fell on Friday). This facilitated a constant strengthening of our faith in G-d - the need to "trust" Him every single day.

Shishi - Sixth Aliya - 26 p'sukim - 16:11-36

[P> 16:11 (17)] The account of the Mahn continues... Quail miraculously appear in the evening, and the people eat "meat". On the next morning, the Mahn - protected by a layer of dew above and below it - appears. The People are fascinated by it and when they question Moshe, he explains the rules and procedures set down by G-d. Nonetheless, there were some who left over Mahn from one day to the next, and this angered Moshe. And, despite being told that the Mahn will NOT fall on Shabbat, there were individuals who went out to search for it.

[S> 16:28 (9)] G-d "takes note" of this display of lack of faith and "asks" how long we will continue to refuse to keep His commands.

The parsha of the Mahn is our first real introduction to Shabbat. This is the meaning of the line in DAYEINU, Had You given us the Shabbat and not brought us near Har Sinai, DAYEINU, there would be sufficient reason to thank You... Although Shabbat is an integral part of Revelation at Sinai (commandment #4), it actually pre-dates Matan Torah.

From the episode of the Mahn we learn the important lesson that Shabbat is honored by being prepared for. It is not just a corollary of the prohibitions of Shabbat that we prepare our food in advance; it is an essential feature of Shabbat and the role of the days of the week.

Included in the instructions about the Mahn is the command not to "leave our PLACE on the seventh day (to collect the Mahn)". This was not just a rule for that generation; it is a mitzva among the 613 - the mitzva of T'chum Shabbat [24, L321 16:29].

Briefly, the point of T'CHUM is not about how far we may walk on Shabbat. It is about how far AWAY FROM HOME we may go. This is obvious from the halachic details of T'CHUM. The weekdays are for going. Shabbat is for staying put (as defined by halacha) and being able to "relax", to ponder G-d's Creation and Mastery over all.

A sample of Mahn was stored as a remembrance for future generations.

MitzvaWatch

It is important to understand that the prohibition of T'CHUM, be it from the Torah or from the Sages, was not meant to put a limit on physical exertion or the distance a person may walk on Shabbat. A person who lives in a house in yememsvelt which is located on a small plot of land with a fence around it, is restricted to a distance of about a

kilometer outside his fence. Another person who lives in a big city can walk from one end to the other - from Gilo to Ramot and back again (or Washington Heights to the Bowery) - miles and miles - and not have a problem of T'CHUM at all. And even the first guy with the house near no others can walk around and around his property all Shabbat long. As long as he does not go outside his T'CHUM, he's okay. (Not really, because he has to figure out why he spends all Shabbat walking in circles around his house, rather than learning Torah, taking a nap, and spending quality time with his family.) The topics of T'CHUM and EIRUV are complex. This only touched on a few points.

Sh'VII Seventh Aliya - 16 p'sukim - 17:1-16

[P> 17:1 (7)] The People journey to R'fidim and again complain about the lack of water. (It is not the complaint itself that "angers" G-d - it is the apparent lack of faith and the doubt in the value of the Exodus that casts a negative light on the People.) In response, G-d tells Moshe to gather the Elders and People and strike a rock in their presence with his miraculous staff. The result is water for the People.

[P> 17:8 (6)] The final nine p'sukim, which is also the Torah reading of Purim morning (and the Maftir for Shabbat Purim in Yerushalayim, this year), tell of Amalek's attack on the

fledgling nation of Israel. It is the archetypical fight against those who would seek to destroy us. This battle repeats itself differently throughout Jewish History.

[P> 17:14 (3)] G-d tells Moshe to write down and tell Yehoshua that I (G-d) will wipe out the memory of Amalek... This is not just Israel's battle, but G-d's as well.

Haftara 52 p'sukim Sho-f'tim 4:4-5:31

In the time of the Judges, Bnei Yisrael found themselves cruelly oppressed. In the sedra it was Par'o; in the haftara it is Yavin and his general, Sisra. D'vora enlists Barak to lead an army against them. With the success of the battle, D'vora sang a song of praise and thanks to G-d, similar in nature to that of Moshe and Bnei Yisrael in the parsha. So too, the People's faith in G-d had similar "ups and downs" to those in the sedra. D'vora was key to restoring a high level of faith in G-d among the People and in leading the People to great victories.

S'faradim read just the Song of D'vora as the haftara of B'shalach. Ashkenazim start earlier and include in the reading the story of Sisra's temporary escape from Barak and his army, only to find his demise at the hand (and tent peg) of Yael, wife of Chever HaKeini.