



TORAH BY THE NUMBERS
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This file linked from PhiloTorah consists of my submissions to the Jewish Press for a weekly column whose first entry was in the May 16th '25 issue - for Shabbat Parshat Emor.

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My plan is to add each week's column at the top, so the files runs through the columns backwards.

JP - PARSHAT TO-L'DOT

Accurate Accentuations & Kislev's Variability Vowel Verbalization & The Revolving Days Of Kislev

This week, Torah by the Numbers goes off subject for a bit - to "Torah by the Syllables."

Most native English speakers (and many others) pronounce the name of this week's sedra as TOL DOT (or TOL DOS). That's wrong.

The first letter, TAV (not TUFF, as many of us learned way back when), is voweled by a CHOLOM. That's a VAV with a dot above it. CHOLOM is a strong vowel and makes its own syllable with the TAV. So the first syllable is TO (sounds like the English words toe and tow).

The next letter is a LAMED with a SH'VA under it. SH'VAs come in two types - SH'VA NA (a moving SH'VA) and SH'VA NACH (a resting SH'VA). A letter with a SH'VA NACH does not add any sound to the letter. For example, in the word shulchan (table), the LAMED has a SH'VA NACH under it and together they finish off the syllable SHUL. Notice that the LAMED contributes an L sound and that's all.

The LAMED in TO-L'DOT has a SH'VA NA, the LAMED + SH'VA begins the next syllable, and there is a very short vowel sound with the LAMED. I transliterate the SH'VA NA using an apostrophe.

Take the word for blessing. Some will write it in English as bracha. But that blends the B and the R (BET and REISH), as in the English words brake, breakfast, or brew. In Hebrew, the consonants are not supposed to be blended - each stands on its own. But writing beracha (which some do) exaggerates the vowel sound of the SH'VA NA. I prefer writing it as b'racha.

Back to the second syllable of this week's sedra-name. The second (and final) syllable is L'DOT. A letter with a SH'VA NA is too weak to stand as its

own syllable. It is joined to the syllable that follows it. So: TO-L'DOT. Another sedra-name that behaves the same way is SHO-F'TIM. Not shof-tim.

Does it make a difference if one reads the Torah and says Tol-dot instead of TO-L'DOT? If you mean, "Does it change the meaning of the word?" - no, it does not. Should the baal k'ri'a (many say baal korei) be corrected in this case? No. So what difference does it make? The difference between correct and incorrect, between careful and careless, fine-tuned and slightly out of focus.

Back to numbers - connected to Kislev, before we get to some for To-l'dot.

Actually, let's back up even further. Let me first tell you why I like to share calendar details with you, dear readers.

It was the very first mitzva that G-d commanded the Jewish People as a whole. We weren't even out of Egypt yet when G-d made us partners with Him in the matter of kedushat z'man, the sanctity of time. He had previously - at Creation - sanctified the Shabbat. We are commanded to keep the Shabbat, but it was G-d who sanctified the day. That's why the text of the b'racha is "M'kadeish HaShabbat" - He (G-d) Who sanctifies the Shabbat.

When it comes to our months and our holy days, there is a different story. G-d fixed the dates and commanded us to observe them, but only on the condition that we - B'nei Yisrael, led by the Sanhedrin - sanctify each and every month of the year. "HaChodesh hazeh lachem" - focus on the word "lachem," for you. And the pasuk says "lachem" again. G-d wants us to be His junior partners in sanctifying time.

The Sanhedrin (past and future), act on behalf of the Jewish People. In this period between Sanhedrins, we use a mathematical system designed

by a Sanhedrin of old to create our calendar. It was that Sanhedrin of old that sanctified all months until the Sanhedrin will be re-established.

But the point is that part of the mitzva of Kiddush HaChodesh (sanctifying each month) is for all of us to know about the calendar. It isn't required, but we should want to understand how the calendar works.

And so... Here's part of that story (just a part).

In our current fixed calendar, Rosh HaShana cannot begin on three specific days of the week. The rule is called LO ADU ROSH. ADU stands for Alef (Sunday), Dalet (Wednesday), and Vav (Friday). (The days of the week are Sunday = Alef; Monday = Bet; Tuesday = Gimel; Wednesday = Dalet; Thursday = Hei; Friday = Vav or U; Shabbat = Zayin.) Thus, Rosh HaShana can begin on Monday, Tuesday, Thursday, or Shabbat. Four days - yes; three days - no.

If the first day of Tishrei cannot be on Sunday, Wednesday, or Friday, then it follows that the second day of Rosh HaShana cannot be on a Monday, Thursday, or Shabbat. And the third day of Tishrei cannot fall on a Tuesday, Friday, or Sunday. And so on...

There are seven variations on LO ADU (see below and accompanying graphic). By the eighth day, we are back to the original LO ADU, which applies to the first and eighth days of Sukkot as well as the first day of Rosh HaShana. The variations are:

LO B'HaZ (not Monday, Thursday, or Shabbat - applies to Simchat Torah in Chutz LaAretz).

LO AGU (not on Sunday, Tuesday, or Friday - this applies to Yom Kippur and many other dates).

LO B'DaZ (not on Monday, Wednesday, or Shabbat)

LO AGaH (not on Sunday, Tuesday, or Thursday)

LO B'DU (not on Monday, Wednesday, or Friday - this one applies to Pesach)

LO G'HaZ (not on Tuesday, Thursday, or Shabbat - this one applies to Shavuot)

Every date from the 1st of Adar (or Adar Rishon) through the months of Adar, Nisan, Iyar, Sivan, Tamuz, Av, Elul, Tishrei, and up to and including the 29th of Marcheshvan - 295 dates, all told - cycles through the seven variations of LO ADU.

And then we come to the day after 29 Marcheshvan. In many years (55%), the following day is 1 Kislev. But in other years (45%), the day after 29 Marcheshvan is 30 Marcheshvan (a.k.a. the first day of Rosh Chodesh Kislev), and the day after that is 1 Kislev (and the second day of Rosh Chodesh Kislev).

The date of 30 Marcheshvan (when there is one) does not follow LO ADU or any of the other 6 variations. It cannot fall on a Monday, Wednesday, Friday, or Shabbat - only on a Sunday, Tuesday, or Thursday. This is a unique configuration of yes/no days.

But look what 30 Marcheshvan on/off does to 1 Kislev. The first day of Kislev can fall on any day of the week except for Shabbat. Unlike the majority of dates (295 or 385 possible calendar dates), a different cycle applies to the first 29 days of Kislev. Those dates cycle as follows: Not on Shabbat (the 1st, 8th, 15th, 22nd, 29th); Not on Sunday (the 2nd, 9th, 16th, 23rd); Not on Monday (the 3rd, 10th, 17th, 24th); Not on Tuesday (the 4th, 11th, 18th, 25th); Not on Wednesday (the 5th, 12th, 19th, 26th); Not on Thursday (the 6th, 13th, 20th, 27th); and Not on Friday (the 7th, 14th, 21st, 28th).

So if your birthday is in Nisan or Tamuz or Tishrei, it can fall on four different days of the week. But if your birthday is in Kislev, it can fall on any of six days of the week.

The 30th of Kislev is also on/off depending upon the year, and that will affect the days of the week possible for dates in Tevet and Sh'vat. But we'll stop for now and save that discussion for another time.

And now let's look at some numbers for To-l'dot.

First, the TorahStats:

Here are some averages to put the numbers into perspective. The Torah is written in 245 columns (that's the usual number, but it can vary) of 42 lines per column. That's over 10,000 lines. With 54 sedras, the average number of lines per sedra is about 190 lines of a Sefer Torah. The range is from V'zot HaB'racha's 70 lines to Naso's 311. To-l'dot, at 172 lines, ranks 36th, just about two-thirds down the list.

P'sukim: The 5,846 total in the Torah means an average of a bit over 108 p'sukim per sedra. To-l'dot's 106 puts it close to average, in 29th place, tied with Vayigash and Bo, each of which is larger than To-l'dot in words and letters.

To-l'dot's p'sukim are on the short side; it ranks 34th (words) and 33rd (letters).

In Parshat Chayei Sara, we read about the ages of three people whose deaths are mentioned: Sara Imeinu died at 127 years of age; Avraham died at 175; and Yishmael died at 137.

When Sara died, Avraham was 137, and he had 38 more years to live. Yishmael was born when Avraham was 86 years old, so Yishmael was 51 when Sara died, and 89 when Avraham died. Yishmael and Yitzchak buried their father at 89 and 75 years of age, respectively.

At the beginning of To-l'dot, the Torah tells us that Yitzchak was 40 years old when he married Rivka. So Avraham was 140 at the wedding and lived for another 35 years.

The Torah also tells us that Yaakov and Eisav were born when Yitzchak was 60 years old. Avraham was then 160, and he died when the twins were 15 years old.

This was the long way of pointing out that last week's sedra, Chayei Sara, closed with events that happened much later in the Book of B'reishit. Chayei Sara ends in the year 2171 from Creation (1589 BCE). To-l'dot begins in 2088 (1672 BCE).

We've seen this pattern earlier. Parshat No'ach ended with Terach's death at 205 years of age. Avraham was 135 at the time. Lech L'cha began when Avraham was 75 years old.

Speculation: The Torah finishes one "story" before beginning the next, when the individuals of the earlier "story" no longer impact on the new "story."

There is a well-known "fact" about the Torah that sometimes events are presented out of chronological sequence - Ein seder mukdam um'uchar baTorah. Reasons for this vary (that is, when we know the reason).

Here's another example from this week's sedra. First topic: the birth of Yaakov and Eisav. Next, the deal - 15 years later - of the transferring of the birthright. Then Yitzchak and Rivka escape a famine and pose as brother and sister in Gerar. They live there for years, digging wells. And more. And then the second major episode of Yaakov and Eisav: Yitzchak is old and blind, and wants to bless Eisav. Rivka has other ideas. And so on...

When did the whole Avimelech in Gerar episode happen? Many commentaries say that it was during the 20 years between the marriage of Yitzchak and Rivka until the birth of the twins. This can explain how Yitzchak and Rivka could have posed as siblings. Hard to do that with children.

It is worth noting that b'chora (birthright) and b'racha (blessing) are anagrams in Hebrew. They are intimately related.

Let's finish off with an observation of the Vilna Gaon. The word b'chor (firstborn) is spelled BET-CHAF-REISH. Each of those letters has a numeric value double that of the previous letter in the Alef-Bet. BET is 2, ALEF is 1; KAF is 20, YUD is 10; REISH is 200, KUF is 100. This alludes to the double portion due a b'chor. No other letters are double the letter before them.

Shabbat Shalom.

JP - CHAYEI SARA - SHABBAT M'VORCHIM

This Shabbat, Parshat Chayei Sara, we bench Rosh Chodesh Kislev, which will be next Friday, November 21st.

Shabbat M'vorchim happens 11 or 12 times a year. Nothing out of the ordinary. But Rosh Chodesh Kislev is something else.

It is the most interesting Rosh Chodesh of the Calendar

This year, Rosh Chodesh is one day. This is so because Marcheshvan has 29 days.

Marcheshvan is one of two variable months. In our fixed calendar, months are assigned either 29 days or 30 days. Except for Marcheshvan and Kislev. Marcheshvan is regularly has 29 days, but in a SHALEIM year, it has 30 days.

Kislev regularly has 30 days, but in a CHASEIR year, it has only 29 days.

This year, 5786, is a K'SEDER year - Marcheshvan has 29 days and Kislev has 30.

To review:

The "general calendar" (January thru December) comes in two lengths - 365 days for a regular year and 366 days in a leap year. Further, the year can begin on any of the seven days of the week, so there are 14 different calendars possible. Regular year beginning on Sunday, Leap Year beginning on Sunday... and so on.

Our Jewish Calendar also has 14 different year-types but they are a little more complicated.

There are three factors for each year-type.

Shana P'shuta, plain years have 12 months -or- Shana M'uberet, 13-month years, two Adars.

What day of the week Rosh HaShana begins. Monday, Tuesday, Thursday, or Shabbat. This reflects the rule for Rosh HaShana - LO ADU ROSH, meaning that Rosh HaShana cannot start on a Sunday (ALEF), Wednesday (DALET), or Friday (VAV).

And, third, the length of Marcheshvan and Kislev.

In our fixed calendar, months alternate between 30 days and 29 days. Tishrei 30, Marcheshvan 29 (but 30 in a Shaleim year), Kislev 30 (but 29 in a Chaseir year), Tevet 29, Sh'vat 30, Adar 29 (when there are two Adars, the first one has 30 days), Nisan 30, Iyar 29, Sivan 30, Tamuz 29, Av 30, Elul 29.

The result is three different calendar situations.

K'seder (or K'sidran) year with Marcheshvan with it's usual 29 days and Kislev with its usual 30 days. K'seder years have 354 or 384 days.

Shaleim years have an extra day - the 30th of Marcheshvan. Shaleim years have 355 or 385 days.

Chaseir years have a missing day - 30 Kislev drops out. Chaseir years have 353 or 383 days.

Mathematically, with P'shuta or M'uberet -and- four different starting days -and- three lengths of years, there should be 24 combinations ($2 \times 4 \times 3 = 24$). But, in practice, there are only 14 actual year-types.

Back to Rosh Chodesh Kislev.

The result of the variability of Marcheshvan's number of days, Rosh Chodesh Kislev can fall on a large variety of days of the week.

R"Ch Kislev can be: Sunday, 21.92% of years; Tuesday, 10.23%; Thursday, 11.51%; Friday, 11.51%. One day Rosh Chodesh - 55.17%

Or... Sunday/Monday, 9.97%; Tuesday/Wednesday, 18.44%; Thursday/Friday, 16.52%. Two days Rosh Chodesh - 44.93%

Notice that Rosh Chodesh Kislev can be on any day of the week - except for Shabbat.

We bench Rosh Chodesh Kislev on Shabbat Parshat Chayei Sara 68.11% of years.

It is on Shabbat Parshat To-l'dot 31.89% of the time - when R"Ch is Sun or Sun/Mon and To-l'dot-M'vorchim is Machar Chodesh.

No other month has such a varied Rosh Chodesh. That's Kislev - but it is due to the sometimes yes, sometimes no - 30th of Marcheshvan.

Parshat Chayei Sara

There are 5846 p'sukim in the Torah. 54 sedras. Average number of p'sukim per sedra is 108. Chayei Sara's 105 p'sukim puts it slightly below average, ranked at 32.

But, Chayei Sara's p'sukim are shorter than average and the sedra's rank drops to 37 for words and 36 for letters. It also ranks 37 for lines in a Sefer Torah.

All-in-all, Chayei Sara is a smallish sedra.

The first numbers we encounter in this week's sedra are in the first pasuk:

And the life of Sara was one hundred years and twenty years and seven years; [these were] the years of the life of Sara. (B'reishit 23:1)

Rashi on the pasuk says:

The reason the word SHANA is written at every term is to tell you that each term must be explained by itself as a complete number: at the age of 100 she was as a woman of 20 as regards sin – for just as at the age of 20 one may regard her as having never sinned, since she had not then reached the age when she was subject to punishment, so, too, when she was 100 years old she was sinless – and when she was 20 she was as beautiful as when she was seven (B'reishit Rabba 58:1).

The total of 127 echoes in Megilat Esther and is the number of provinces in Achashveirosh's kingdom. There doesn't seem to be a connection, but there are midrashic sources that comment on the number and its messages.

When you see or hear, Torah by the Numbers, what comes to mind? I bet some of you would say Gimatriya. I agree. And I don't do enough of them, but I have a nice one for Chayei Sara.

For many years, I have been searching on and off for Gimatriya Matches. These are two (or more) p'sukim or neat partial p'sukim, or even words that have the same numeric value and that combined, they say something meaningful or interesting. My searches are assisted by TES's Bible Gematria program. Here's one of my favorite GMs (Gimatriya Matches).

The opening pasuk of Chayei Sara (B'reishit 23:1) is

"Sara had lived to be 100+20+7 (127) years old. [These were] the years of Sara's life."

Before I show you what I found, let's take a look at a Rashi quoting the Midrash B'reishit Rabba that describes Sara Imeinu's special life. That Rashi is on the pasuk at the end of perek 24, when Yitzchak brings Rivka into his mother's tent, and the midrash says that when Sara died, the specialness of her tent disappeared; but when Rivka came into the family, it returned.

"...For while Sara was living, a light had been burning in the tent from one Shabbat eve to the next, there was always a blessing in the dough (a miraculous increase) and a cloud was always hanging over the tent (as a divine protection)..."

That's a pretty nice summary of Sara's life, with the association with both Shabbat and the Beit HaMikdash - Shabbat atmosphere, tent, cloud, light (Menorah and Shabbat candles), special bread (Lechem HaPanim and regular HaMotzi).

Here are both Vayikra 19:30 and Vayikra 26:2 - two identical p'sukim - the gimatriya of each (3623) matches Chayei Sara's opener -

"Keep My Sabbaths and revere My sanctuary. I am God."

Sara's life was a prototype of the Shabbat and Mikdash, making her truly SARA IMEINU.

Gimatriya Matches do not prove anything, but they sometimes make a beautiful point. That's what this GM does.

Avraham paid 400 silver shekels to Efron for the Machpeila Cave and Field back in 2085 to Creation (1676 BCE). To try to get an idea of how much that would be today, I put Chat-GPT to the task. It spent a lot of time (relative to its usual speed at answering my questions) and I had to decide what method of comparison it should use. Finally, with several warnings about the impossibility of getting an accurate figure, it came up with Avraham's 400 silver shekels having the buying power as of today, at half a million dollars. Was that a lot for Efron to take, especially when he originally offered to give Avraham the land? Sounds like an exorbitant amount. Which is what Rashi seems to indicate.

BTW, if we just calculate to value of 400 silver shekels at today's price of silver, we get a much smaller amount. Much. The Torah tells us that the biblical silver shekel weighed 20 grains of silver. 400 shekels would then

be 8000 grains of silver. According to Google, that is 16 and 2/3 Troy ounces of silver. That would cost \$809 today.

How come Avraham didn't accept the gift of burial land from the people of Cheit, who made the offer, recognizing that Avraham was N'si Elokim, a prince of God in our midst? And why didn't he accept the land as a gift from Efron, who also made that generous offer?

The short answer is that even though Avraham was promised by G-d that he would receive all of Canaan, he had to purchase at least part of the land so that he would have an undisputable title to the land.

This hasn't stopped the Moslem Arab world from denying our claim to Chevron, but...

The specific amount is significant. 400 is the numeric value of the letter TAV (TUF, as we incorrectly pronounced it in our childhood). It therefore represents a full, complete number.

The number has previously occurred in the Covenant Between the Pieces (Brit Bein HaB'tarim) when G-d told Avraham that his descendants will be strangers in a strange land and oppressed there for 400 years - a full amount of time. (Reminder that the actual time in Egypt was 210 years; the 400 is counted from the birth of Yitzchak).

And the number appears later in the Chumash when Yaakov is told that Eisav is approaching with 400 men - a full (fighting) force.

The number also shows up a couple of times later in Tanach.

The number of times certain names occur in the sedra are interesting. Avraham occurs 37 times - by far, the most often. Sara occurs 9 times. Yitzchak and Rivka each occur 13 times. Interesting.

Most interesting, IMO, is the name Eliezer. He is a major character in the sedra. But his name never appears. His name is not important; his

description is.

He is called Eved Avraham, 3 times. He is called HA-EVED - the servant, 9 times. And he is referred to as HA-ISH - the man, also 9 times. Specifically, in relation to Avraham, he is HA-EVED. But when dealing with Betu'el and Lavan and Rivka, he is called HA-ISH.

But watch this - B'reishit 24:61 - "And Rivka and her maidens arose and rode on the camels, and they followed THE MAN; and THE SERVANT took Rebecca 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, the very next use of the term HA-ISH, in verse 65 - And she said to the servant, "Who is THAT MAN walking in the field towards us?" The servant answered her - that is Yitzchak.

As long as I'm signing off with Shabbat Shalom, and as long as we have shared a GM (gimatriya match), let me share another for the word SHALOM. $300+30+6+40 = 376$. There is only one whole pasuk in Tanach with a gimatriya of 376. It is Sh'mot 15:18 in Parshat B'shalach, in Shirat HaYam - HaShem yimloch l'olam va'ed - G-d shall reign for ever and ever. That is true, of course, all the time. But the whole world will finally recognize it when there is complete SHALOM in the world.

JP - VAYEIRA

Parshat Vayeira is the 7th, 5th, 3rd, and 2nd longest sedra of the Torah's 54 sedras.

If we count length of a sedra by the number of p'sukim it has, then Vayeira's 147 p'sukim puts it in 7th place. Just for perspective, the six sedras that are longer than Vayeira are Naso (176), Pinchas (168), Bamidbar (159), No'ach (153), Vayishlach (153), Vayitzei (148).

If we count length of a sedra by how many lines of a Sefer Torah is consists of, then it rises to 5th place with 255 lines, bypassing No'ach, Vayitzei, and Vayishlach - but falling closely behind Parshat R'ei, which has fewer p'sukim, but many more parshiyot, which means more blank spaces that add to the number of lines.

But if we count length by number of words or letters, Vayeira jumps to 2nd (2085 words) and 3rd (7862 letters).

You decide what should determine length of a sedra.

Naso, BTW, is first in all four categories - 311 lines, 176 p'sukim, 2264 words, and 8632 letters.

All tolled, Vayeira is a long sedra.

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With the word VAYEIRA, we would expect the next words to be HASHEM EL AVRAHAM. And G-d appeared to Avraham. Instead, we find VAYEIRA EILAV HASHEM, and to him G-d appeared. The use of a pronoun rather than a proper noun (the person's name) indicates that we are in the middle of a story rather than at the beginning of something. EILAV, to him, refers to Avraham and specifically to his having circumcised himself at the age of 99.

This is where our sedra begins.

Avraham had just circumcised himself. He was 99 years old. Yitzchak was a year away from being born.

Avraham was born in 1948 from Creation. (The same number, counting years from a different starting point, cannot escape our notice.) Sara was born in 1958.

So the year at the beginning of the sedra is 2047. Ten generations from No'ach to Avraham. As of 2047, Avraham's father was still alive and would live for another 36 years. The following ancestors were still alive: Sheim ben No'ach. Arpachshad, Shelach, Eiver, and S'rug (who would die two years later). Sheim, Shelach, and Eiver would outlive Avraham Avinu.

The sedra ends with Akeidat Yitzchak and the passing of Sara in 2085. Parshat Vayeira spans 38 years. A bit different from Parshat B'reishit's 1638-year time-span.

Before there was Torah Tidbits there were Torah Tidbits. And one of the very first Torah Tidbits was entitled "Angel Arithmetic". Kind of appropriate for Torah by the Numbers.

Based on the "rule" that an angel is given a single mission and that one angel cannot do two missions, G-d sends three angels to visit Avraham with three missions:

(1) To heal Avraham from his Brit Mila,

(2) To announce the birth of Yitzchak (in one year),

(3) To destroy S'dom.

After the visit with Avraham, after the first two missions were accomplished, the third angel, joined by one of the other angels whose mission was completed, continue onto S'dom with two missions to

accomplish:

(1) To save Lot,

(2) To destroy S'dom.

Okay, here are the questions:

Four tasks - three angels. Are angels in such short supply that G-d didn't send four angels in the first place? Why use one angel who finished his task to give him a new task.

Or, if an angel can take on a new task upon completion of a previous task, so only two angels are needed in the first place.

The second question is easier to answer. Not only are angels one-task-at-a-time, they also have the same kind of tasks. An angel who heals, for example, does not also destroy. This is why a third angel was necessary - the one to destroy S'dom.

This leaves the first question. Is G-d stingy with angels?

Here is an answer suggested by the Chidushei HaRim, as found in Maayana shel Torah, Wellsprings of Torah.

Originally, there were three tasks for which three angels were sent. Heal Avraham, announce the birth of Yitzchak, destroy S'dom.

Saving Lot was not originally part of the plan. His worthiness to be saved was not certain. True, he was Avraham's nephew and he had learned things from his uncle. But was it enough to save him? Not certain.

When it comes to a person's merit, he can get credit (so to speak) from his past and present actions and character - and also from his future. Lot had another thing working in his favor - he was the progenitor of Ruth - The Mother of Royalty. Ruth, from whom David HaMelech and the entire Beit

Malchut David (the House of David) descended, including Melech HaMashiach.

Pretty impressive. Certainly, that would be enough to save Lot.

Ah, there is a little technical problem: The Torah states that a Moavite cannot marry into the "Congregation of G-d". Specifically, even though a Moavite can convert to Judaism, there are marriage restrictions.

If these restrictions were to apply to Ruth, then she would never become the Mother of Royalty.

The question revolves around the word MO'AVI, Moavite. Does it refer to men and women, or, just to men. Many words in the Torah can sometimes be inclusive and sometimes, exclusive. Which is it for Mo'avi?

A Sanhedrin in the time of Boaz and Ruth declared that Mo'avi was specific to males, and the rule (of restricted marriage) did not apply to a Mo'aviya, a female Moavite. Thus, Ruth was able to marry Boaz... and the rest is history.

On what grounds was that clarification of Mo'avi made? The Torah gives a reason for excluding a Mo'avi from marrying into K'hal H'S???

D'varim 23:5 states - Because they did not greet you with bread and water on the way, when you left Egypt...

The Sanhedrin reasoned that it would be the men who were hostile towards the Israelites, not the women, who would modestly remain in the background and not be part of the hostile encounter.

And where does that reasoning come from, that women are innately modest? From Sara Imeinu! Sara, not only the Matriarch of the Jewish People, but of many nations.

B'reishit 17:16 at the end of Lech L'cha states - And I will bless her, and I

will give you a son from her, and I will bless her, and she will become [a mother of] nations; kings of nations will be from her. "

Be patient - a little more... What was the defining moment that Sara displayed this modesty-trait of womanhood? When the angels ask Avraham where his wife Sara was and the answer was, "Behold in the tent." That justified our Sages' ruling that the marriage restriction did not apply to Ruth. That led to her being the Mother of Royalty. And that got Lot the merit he needed to be saved from the destruction of S'dom.

And so, an angel who had just healed Avraham was available to join the destroying angel heading for S'dom, in order to save Lot and his daughters.

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And here's a famous number for you - TEN. Pirkei Avot 5:4 - With ten trials, our father Avraham was tried, and he stood firm in them all, to make known how great was the love of our father Avraham.

Quick - What was the tenth and final test? Most people will answer - AKEIDAT YITZCHAK, the Binding of Isaac. And most commentaries who list the ten trials of faith will agree. But not all of them.

The wording in the Torah (B'reishit 22:12) seems to point to the Akeida as the final test of faith - 'And he (an angel) said, "Do not stretch forth your hand to the lad, nor do the slightest thing to him, for now I know that you are a G-d fearing man, and you did not withhold your son, your only one, from Me.'"

However, Rabbeinu Yona (Yona ben Avraham Gerondi, 13th c. Contemporary and M'chutan of the Ramban) says that the death and burial of Sara was a further test of Avraham's faith. He had been promised repeatedly that the Land of Canaan would be his, and yet he had to buy land there to bury Sara.

Others say that marrying off Yitzchak was also a test of faith.

From the fiery furnace (some count and others don't) to Lech L'cha... down to Egypt, back to Canaan... to the second Lech L'cha which sent Avraham with Yitzchak to Har HaMoriya for the Akeida - and even more.

Avraham did not have an easy life. But his life set the precedents of Jewish character throughout all the generations since.

<><><><><>

The gimatriya of Avraham is 248, the number of Mitzvot Asei, positive commands of the Torah. The number of parts of the body. The number of words in the Sh'ma. A very significant number for a very significant person - the progenitor of the Jewish People.

Shabbat Shalom

JP - LECH L'CHA

Before we get to Lech L'cha, let's take a look at the time-span of the whole Torah, and specifically, of Parshat B'reishit and Parshat No'ach.

We'll not count the first two p'sukim - B'reishit Bara and V'Ha-Aretz, because, according to one major school of thought, describes an undefinable and untimed period that occurred before Day One of Creation.

So, beginning with Vayomer Elokim Y'hi Or... (B'reishit 1:3) and going to the end of the Torah, we're talking about 2488 years. Bnei Yisrael is poised on the threshold of Eretz Yisrael.

Parshat No'ach begins with G-d's command to No'ach to build the ark and prepare for the coming Flood. According to Tradition, that command came 120 years before the Flood came. The Flood began in 1656 years from Creation, so Parshat No'ach begins in year 1536.

This means that Parshat B'reishit spans 1536 years. That's almost 62% of the Torah's time-span in one sedra of the 54 sedras of the Torah.

Parshat No'ach ends with the death of Terach at age 205. That was in year 2083. Which means that Parshat No'ach spans 547 years. That's 22% of the whole Torah's time-span, bringing the first two sedras to a whopping 84%.

You might think that this leaves only 16% for the rest of the Torah - but that is not accurate. Why not?

Let's look at the numbers more closely. Terach was 70 years old when Avra(ha)m was born. Terach died at 205 years old. So Avra(ha)m was 135 years old at the time. Yet the Torah tells us that Avra(ha)m was 75 years old when HaShem told him to Lech L'cha (in the year 2023 from Creation). Which means that there is a 60-year overlap between No'ach and Lech L'cha. This means that the actual time-span from Parshat Lech L'cha to

the end of V'zot HaB'racha is 465 years, which is 18.7% of the Torah's whole time-span.

Numbers and more numbers - what's my point?

The Torah was given by HaShem to Am Yisrael, the Jewish People. Whatever the rest of the world has learned or failed to learn from the Torah, the Torah is ours. It is the Life of the Jewish People. its mitzvot are ours. It is the document of the special and unique relationship between G-d and His Chosen People.

And yet, four fifths of the time-span of the Torah deals with over 2000 years before Judaism. How come?

It is because we are not just Jews. We are human beings. Our Judaism does not replace our membership in the human race - it adds to it. All that G-d expects and requires of all the other peoples of the world is basic human decency and morality, as delineated by the Sheva Mitzvot Bnei No'ach - the Seven Noahide Laws. They are the formula for all descendants of No'ach (which is everyone on Earth) for the proper behavior of individuals and for the proper functioning of society.

And the remaining one fifth of the Torah's time-frame, presented in the 52 sedras from Lech L'cha and on - that is for the spiritual and religious life that G-d commands and wants for the Jewish People.

Lech L'cha - how big a sedra? Let's divide the sedras into three categories: The top 18 sedras, the middle 18, and the bottom 18. Ranking change from statistic to statistic.

Lech L'cha is written on 208 lines in a Sefer Torah. Ranks 23rd. Middle size sedra.

But its 128 p'sukim ranks 13th - in the top third.

Words and letters? Ranks 18th and 19th. Right around the line between top

and middle third.

The variations in ranking are due to shorter than average p'sukim.

Lech L'cha has one of the 613 mitzvot - BRIT MILA. Of the 54 sedras, 17 (almost one third) have no mitzvot of the Taryag. Another 5 have only one mitzva.

Speaking of BRIT MILA: The command to circumcise Jewish males is stated clearly in Parshat Tazri'a. And yet, the popular source for the mitzva is Parshat Lech L'cha, in the story of Avraham's circumcision, that of his son Yishmael, and the males of Avraham's household.

The mitzva has a few names. We say, I'm going to a BRIT tomorrow morning. Sometimes, it is referred to as MILA. Its full name is BRIT MILA.

The two halves of the full name reflect the two b'rachot recited on the occasion. And the b'rachot point to the two aspects of the mitzva.

The first is the physical act of removing the foreskin and other actions that are performed by the Mohel. When a father assigns a Mohel to do the Mila, it is the Mohel who makes the bracha ...ASHER KID'SHANU... AL HAMILA. This aspect of the mitzva is accomplished in a matter of seconds. Immediately after the Mohel's bracha, the father of the baby boy recites a second mitzva-bracha - ...ASHER KID'SHANU... L'HACHNISO BIVRITO SHEL AVRAHAM AVINU, to enter the child into the covenant of Avraham. If the Mohel's job is the MILA part of the mitzva, the father's (and mother's) part of the mitzva is to raise the child in a loving manner to practice and appreciate all the mitzvot of the Torah.

It is significant that the father gives over the MILA to the Mohel but retains for himself and his wife the commitment to prepare a new member of Klal Yisrael for a life of Torah and mitzvot.

MILA, a bunch of seconds; BRIT, a good number of years.

MILA is one of the mitzvot of the Torah; the BRIT represents all of the mitzvot. We could say, the other 612 mitzvot. Gimatriya of BRIT is $2+200+10+400 = 612$. BRIT (612) = MILA (1) = 613.

Take another look at the two brachot (not counting the SHE-HE-CHE-YANU, which is said in Israel and often not said in Chutz LaAretz). Customs may vary.

Mitzva-brachot come in two styles - AL and L' - "on" and "to". A gerund noun and an infinitive verb.

On the eating of matza. On the reading of the Megila. On the washing of the hands. On taking the Lulav. On the Mila. And many others.

To light the candle of Shabbat. To light the Chanuka candle. To affix the Mezuzah. To dwell in the Sukkah. To enter the child into the Covenant of Avraham Avinu.

These bracha-forms are not random, nor are they interchangeable. And each form tells us something different about the mitzva.

Mitzva to eat matza on Seder night. You take a kazayit (or two), make the bracha, bite, chew, swallow, bite chew, swallow... and the mitzva is completed. And you did it all. Bracha on Megila reading, 35-50 minutes later (more or less), the mitzva is done. The reader and the listeners have done the whole mitzva. Wash for HaMotzi, wash your hands, make the bracha, dry them - mitzva is done by your action. Mohel makes his bracha and then performs the MILA - done.

But when you light Shabbat or Yom Tov candles, you only start the mitzva going. The candles must continue to burn beyond the performance of the mitzva. You start it and it keeps on going. L'HADLIK. Same for Chanuka candles. They must burn for at least half hour after stars-out. You set the mitzva in motion and it continues beyond your first action. You must affix a mezuzah to your doorpost and it must remain there beyond your initial action. If you take it down for painting or if it falls off, you must put it up

again. The mitzva is ongoing, therefore LIKBO'A rather than AL K'VI'AT. You eat in the Sukka. The mitzva is not completed yet. It is ongoing. You ideally learn there, read there, play games with your kids there, sleep there. LEISHEIV rather than AL. And the BRIT part of BRIT MILA is ongoing. As long as parents are capable and the children are hopefully responsive - Chinuch is an ongoing part of the mitzva.

There is so much more to discuss about Parshat Lech L'cha - and no room to do it. But let's look at a few more numbers.

The name AVRAHAM occurs 175 times in Tanach - over 150 time in the Torah and the rest in Nevi'im and K'tuvim.

In the Book of B'reishit, we find AVRAM mentioned 59 times and only two more times elsewhere in Tanach. AVRAHAM is mentioned 133 time in the Book of B'reishit.

Avraham died at age 175. His name Avraham is mentioned 175 time in Tanach. Does this mean something? I have no idea, but it is interesting nonetheless.

Shabbat Shalom

JP - NO'ACH

If Shabbat B'reishit is always Shabbat M'vorchim Marcheshvan (which it is, as I wrote in last week's column), then it follows that Parshat No'ach is always read as the first sedra in the month of Marcheshvan.

That has an interesting connection between Parshat No'ach and Marcheshvan. The sedra deals with the Mabul, the great Flood. In Israel, we start asking for rain (the good kind, not the destructive kind of the Flood) on the 7th of Marcheshvan, which is one of the days that follow the reading of Parshat No'ach.

Furthermore, The Mabul started and ended in the month of Marcheshvan. (This is based on reference to the second month - which is Iyar, but only after the Mitzva of HaChodesh HaZeh Lachem Rosh Chodoshim, which established Nisan as the first month. However, there is a consensus among commentaries that the Flood was 17 Marcheshvan to 27 Marcheshvan.)

And furthermore, the Mishna in Taanit says that if rain hasn't started by the 17th of Marcheshvan, then pious individuals would accept upon themselves to fast and pray for rain.

So Marcheshvan is about no rain, bad rain, and hopefully, Gishmei Bracha, blessed rain.

No'ach and Marcheshvan - a good and meaningful match.

With 153 p'sukim, Parshat No'ach ranks 4th in the Torah (behind Naso, Pinchas, and Bamidbar - all in the book of Bamidbar). So it is the largest sedra pasuk-wise in the book of B'reishit. (Tied with Vayishlach.)

However, No'ach has very short p'sukim - it ranks 49th and 51st (of 54) in words and letters per pasuk, dropping it to 6th place in Sefer B'reishit and 11th and 13th in the Torah.

And its being written in a Sefer Torah on 230 lines finds it in 15th place.

Big sedra; short p'sukim.

Towards the end of Parshat B'reishit, the Torah records the births of No'ach's three sons - Sheim, Cham, Yefet) from when he was 500 years old. That was far older than the first births recorded of the first nine generations. I don't have a significant point explaining that, but sometimes the Torah by the Numbers column just gives you numbers.

Lots of numbers in Parshat No'ach. Dimensions of the teiva (ark) - 300 amot (cubits) long, 50 amot wide, 30 amot tall. In feet (approx.) - 450' x 75' x 45'. And for readers anywhere besides the United States, Liberia, and Myanmar (the only three countries in the world that have not metricated) - 135m x 22.5m x 13.5m. Of course, there are different lengths of the ama, depending upon who you ask, but we won't get into that now.

More importantly, the question is why does the Torah give us the dimensions of the Teiva.

The Ramban discusses the significance of the Torah's giving details for the Teiva. He says that it shows that the job is totally impossible to do in a natural way. No way the Teiva as constructed could house all the pairs of animals and seven pairs of kosher animals. No way that a year's supply of food for all aboard could fit in the Teiva, as built.

And here's the point. G-d intended to destroy the world except for No'ach and company. He could have snapped His figurative finger and POOF, No'ach and family and the animals are ready to start all over again. But He didn't do it that way. Not His style, so to speak.

He could of tasked No'ach to do it all. Not practical, to say the least.

Partnership. We become G-d's junior partners - He contributes the miraculous, supernatural part. We do the "hishtadlus", the effort that G-d wants us to expend so that His miracles can work and we can value them.

Two of every animal and 14 of the kosher ones. So here's a question. 14 cows, 14 sheep, 14 goats - I get that. No'ach was to offer sacrifices to G-d after he and family emerged from the Teiva having survived the Flood.

What about ibex, kudu, giraffe...? If the extra kosher animals were primarily for food, then 14 of each of them makes sense. If the purpose was for korbanot (sacrifices), then maybe only two of each, since those kosher animals are not fit for the Altar.

The answer is that No'ach and his descendants - B'nei No'ach, can offer sacrifices to HaShem, the G-d of Israel, the One God, from any kosher animal. They are not restricted to cow, goat, and sheep, as Bnei Yisrael would be in the future.

So whether it was meant for korbanot or food, the bottom line is that No'ach was told to take seven pairs of all animals that were Tahor (what we call Kosher).

Back to the Flood. Numbers and dates. No'ach got a seven day warning before the rains started. No'ach was 600 years old when the Flood came. The rain came down for 40 days and 40 nights. Water level reached 15 amot above the highest mountains. The water stayed for another 110 days, for a total of 150 days.

Spoiler alert: Without knowing the lengths of each month, we cannot produce an accurate timeline of the Flood.

On the 17th of Nisan, the Ark rested on Mt. Ararat. About 75 days later, on the first day of the 10th month (Tamuz), the tops of mountains became visible.

Forty days later (about the 12th of Av), No'ach opened the window of the Ark.

Let's say he then sent the raven out, and a week later, he sent the dove

out. A week later, he sent the dove out again (this time it returned with an olive branch), and then a week later he sent it out a third time and it did not return.

A number of weeks later, the water had receded and he removed the covering of the Ark. It was on the first of the first month, which, as we've said, was Tishrei.

And finally, on the 27th of Marcheshvan, the land had dried up and No'ach was ready to leave the Ark and start the world all over again (so to speak).

The breakdown of the time in the Teiva (Ark) is not necessarily accurate, as already mentioned. What is significant, though, is that the whole Flood from beginning to end was the length of a solar year - 365 days or so.

Of further significance is that the year of the Flood is not really counted - probably because during that year, the laws of nature were suspended, as was time itself (whatever that means).

An indication of this is the Torah's telling us that No'ach was 600 years old when the Flood began, and that he lived for 350 more years after the Flood, and that he lived for 950 years altogether. The year of the Flood is missing from the calculation.

For those who like gimatriya, here is a GM (Gimatriya Match) I found a number of years ago.

The pasuk referred to above that ended - not just the episode of the Flood, but marks the end of the whole first era of the world - from Creation to the end of the Flood, is B'reishit 8:14 - "And in the second month, on the twenty seventh day of the month, the earth was dry."

The numeric value of that whole pasuk is 2701. And that is also the gimatriya of the first pasuk in the Torah - "In the beginning of God's creation of the heavens and the earth."

Beautifully matched bookends to the first 1656 years of the world.

Another very significant number for Parshat No'ach is seven. Specifically in context of the Seven Noachide Laws. They are not all spelled out in the sedra, but they are obviously connected because of No'ach.

The seven include "the big three" - idolatry, murder, sexual immorality. And four more mitzva categories: ALEF, BET, GIMEL, DALET. ALEF is for Eiver min HaChai (limb from a living animal), the only kashrut law that we believe is universal. BET is for Blessing God (that's a euphemism for the opposite). GIMEL is for Gezel, stealing in several different ways. These first six Noahide mitzvot are all prohibitions. The seventh one - DALET is Dinim, laws and courts. This is a broad command to establish a system of laws and the mechanism to enforce them - for the proper functioning of society.

Even though we call them Seven Mitzvot, they are actually chapter headings for many mitzvot. For example, GEZEL includes stealing, robbing, cheating in business... and many other prohibitions.

Let's finish with one more number. Just as No'ach's birth is recorded at the end of Parshat B'reishit, so too is Avraham's birth recorded at the end of Parshat No'ach. Avraham Avinu was born in the year from Creation 1948. No'ach was 892 years old when Avraham was born. No'ach was born in the year 1056 from Creation. He lived 950 years, meaning he died in 2006, when Avraham was 58 years old. Hey, here's one more gimatriya. The numeric value of No'ach is 58, Avraham's age when No'ach died.

Shabbat Shalom

JP - B'REISHIT 5786 - SHABBAT M'VORCHIM

This new year of 5786 started - as it often does - with a whirlwind of Yom Tov, Shabbat, Yom Kippur, Shabbat, Yom Tov, Chol HaMoed, Shabbat Chol HaMoed, Hoshana Rabba, Sh'mini Atzeret & Simchat Torah (one day in Israel - two outside) - DEEP BREATH! And then boom, sooner than usual - it's Shabbat again. On Simchat Torah we had the preview - this Shabbat, we get the whole first sedra of the Torah.

We'll get back to B'reishit shortly. First let's look at the year we just began.

The Current Jewish Calendar consists of 14 different year-types. Seven of them are SHANA P'SHUTA (12 months; one Adar) and seven of them are SHANA M'UBERET (13 months; two Adars).

Four year-types begin on Monday, four year-types begin on Thursday, four year-types begin on Shabbat, and two year-types begin on Tuesday (like this year). Our years cannot begin on a Sunday, Wednesday, or Friday. This calendar rule is called LO ADU ROSH. ADU = ALEF-DALET-VAV = Sun. Wed. Fri.

Year-types are coded with three Hebrew letters. The first letter is either a PEI for SHANA P'SHUTA (a 12-month, one-Adar year) or a MEM for SHANA M'UBERET (a 13-month, two-Adar year).

The second letter is for the day of the week that the year (Rosh HaShana) begins. It can be a BET (Mon.), GIMEL (Tue.), HEI (Thu.), or ZAYIN (Shabbat).

The third letter is either a SHIN (for SHALEIM, full, with Marcheshvan having a 30th day - it usually has 29) or a CHET (for CHASEIR, missing/deficient, with Kislev having only 29 days - it usually has 30) or KAF (for K'SEIDER or K'SIDRAN, in order, with Marcheshvan having its usual 29 days and Kislev having its usual 30 days). Marcheshvan and Kislev are the only two variable months - the others are fixed at 29 or 30 days each.

5786 is a PEI-GIMEL-KAF year. This year-type occur on average 6.25% of the time. But they are not evenly distributed. The last PEI-GIMEL-KAF year was 17 years ago. And the one before that was only 3 years earlier. The next scheduled one is 27 years from now.

Important and prayer-filled note: Our fixed calendar will give way to the original and preferred system of Sanctification of the Month and adding an extra Adar periodically when we have a Sanhedrin - my that come speedily in our time (BIMHEIRA B'YAMEINU).

Since we've been discussing the calendar, let me say that Shabbat M'vorchim for Marcheshvan is ALWAYS on Shabbat B'reishit. No other month has a similar ALWAYS. The weekly Parsha of all the other Shabbatot M'vorchim varies for every other Shabbat M'vorchim, depending on the year-type.

Shabbat B'reishit is the name of the Shabbat; it's not just Shabbat Parshat B'reishit, as with almost all other weekly sedras. In fact, there is only one other Shabbat that is NAMED for what we read on that Shabbat. Can you guess which one? Hint: it isn't a sedra name, but it is for something we read in the Torah on that Shabbat. Tell you later, further down in the column.

And I'm not talking about Sh'kalim, Zachor, Para, or HaChodesh - they are named for their Maftirs.

Since we are talking about names of special Shabbatot, let's finish with four Shabbatot that are named for their haftara. I'll tell you - but pose these as riddles for your children, grandchildren, and/or Shabbat guests (disqualify them from answering if they've read this column). Shabbat Shuva (between Rosh HaShana and Yom Kippur), Shabbat HaGadol (the Shabbat before Pesach), Shabbat Chazon (the Shabbat Parshat D'varim, read right before Tish'a b'Av), and Shabbat Nachamu (Shabbat Parshat Va'etchanan, read right after Tish'a b'Av).

The other Shabbat named for something we read in the sedra - Shabbat Shira (a.k.a. Shabbat Parshat B'shalach).

And now to Parshat B'reishit.

It is written on 241 lines in a Sefer Torah. It's a long sedra, but not the longest - it ranks 9th of the 54 sedras in the Torah.

It is made up of 23 parshiyot (10 open and 13 closed). Again, that's a lot, but not

the most - it ranks 6th.

Its 146 p'sukim puts it tied with Mikeitz for 8th place. Also in 8th place for words. But it drops to 11th place for letters, indicating that its words are shorter than average for the Torah.

B'reishit is - of course - the first sedra of the first Book of the Torah. And the beginning of the whole Torah. We have a scribal custom that the first letter - BET is written by a sofer larger than regular.

Commentaries discuss the fact that the Torah did not start with an ALEF - there might have been significance in starting the Torah with the first letter of the ALEF-BET. In fact, the Aseret HaDibrot (the Ten Commandments) begins with an ALEF.

Some suggest that since the word ARUR (cursed) begins with an ALEF and the word BARUCH (blessed) begins with a BET, that G-d chose to begin the Torah with a BET.

Others see significance in the form of the BET. It is closed on the top, on the back, and on the bottom. It is open only in front. This might signify that we should not dwell on trying to understand what is above us (the heavenly realms) nor what is below us (the netherworld) nor what is behind us (what came before Creation of this world. We should focus our attention on This World, from its Creation and onwards.

Parshat B'reishit contains one of the 613 mitzvot of the Torah, the first one. It is the mitzva of P'RU URVU, Be fruitful and multiply. Marry, have children, raise a family.

Pirkei Avot 5:1 tells us that the world was Created with 10 Divine Utterances. This refers to the opening pasuk of B'reishit and the repeated phrase VAYOMER ELOKIM, and G-d said... The 10th saying on the list can be seen as G-d's saying to the first humans - ADAM & CHAVA - to be fruitful and multiply. But wait - that's not an act of His Creation like Let there be light, let the earth spring forth with vegetation, and so on. This tenth utterance turned the Creation over to us humans. We complete Creation by producing generation after generation. Without that, there would be nothing left of G-d's world.

Even though we count P'RU URVU as the first of our mitzvot, the fact that it was first commanded to Adam & Chava, give procreation a universal significance. Yishayahu 45:18 says: ... LO TOHU V'RA'AH, LASHEVET Y'TZARAH... - ... He did not create it for a waste, He formed it to be inhabited...

The universal nature of P'RU URVU explains an unusual halacha. If a non-Jew has children and he and they convert to Judaism, then he is considered to have fulfilled the mitzva of P'RU URVU. Think about that. He wasn't Jewish when he fathered children. Yet he is credited for having fulfilled the mitzva. And there is even an opinion that his mitzva of P'RU URVU is fulfilled even if his children do not convert.

Let me conclude with a gimatriya. Sh'mot 26:31 says - And you shall make a dividing curtain (PAROCHET) of blue, purple, and crimson wool, and twisted fine linen; the work of a master weaver... Admittedly, this is a partial pasuk, but its numeric value is 5786! May we see and rejoice in the rebuilding of the Beit HaMikdash even this year!

And here's one for B'REISHIT. Its gimatriya is 913. Its AT-BASH gimatriya (reverses the ALEF-BET so ALEF is 400, BET is 300... TAV is 1) is 746. The gimatriya of T'hilim 116:5 is 746 and it states: HaShem is gracious and righteous, and our God is merciful. A nice thought to begin the new cycle of Torah reading.

Shabbat Shalom

JP - HA'AZINU - SUKKOT

G'MAR CHATIMA TOVA, dear readers.

When Rosh HaShana is Thursday/Friday, Yom kippur will be on a Shabbat and Sukkot will be the Thursday after YK - No Shabbat between YK and Sukkot.

When Rosh HaShana is Shabbat/Sunday, Yom Kippur will be on a Monday and Sukkot will be on the following Shabbat - No Shabbat between YK and Sukkot.

In such cases - which occur about 60% of years, Nitzavim and Vayeilech are combined for the last Shabbat of the previous year and Ha'azinu is read on the Shabbat between RH and YK - on Shabbat Shuva.

But - when RH is Monday/Tuesday or Tuesday/Wednesday (as it was this year, 5786), then YK is on Wednesday or Thursday and Sukkot begins on Monday or Tuesday, and there IS a Shabbat between YK and Sukkot. That happens about 40% of years.

When that happens, Ha'azinu is needed for that Shabbat (between YK and Sukkot) and Vayeilech becomes the reading for Shabbat Shuva, leaving Nitzavim to finish the year on its own.

Because of the two roles that Ha'azinu can play, it is paired with two different haftarot. When it is Shabbat Shuva, we read SHUVA YISRAEL AD HASHEM ELOKECHA... from Hoshei'a 14 and then TIK-U SHOFAR... from Yoel 2. (There are other customs besides this one).

But when it is read on the Shabbat between YK and Sukkot, its haftara is one of the longest ones, from Shmuel Bet 22 - a whopping 51 p'sukim. Ha'azinu only has 52 p'sukim, so reading another 51 p'sukim is off the charts (so to speak). This haftara contains SHIRAT DAVID, David's Song, which complements Ha'azinu which is made up mostly of Moshe's Song.

At 52 p'sukim, it ranks 51st out of the Torah's 54 sedras - followed by V'zot HaB'racha with 41, Nitzavim with 40, and Vayeilech with 30 p'sukim.

Because its p'sukim are relatively short, Ha'azinu drops to 52nd place in word

and letter count, behind Nitzavim which takes over at 51st place.

Ha'azinu's song is written in a different way from the rest of the Torah. The Song of the Sea (SHIRAT HAYAM) in Parshat B'shalach is also written differently from the rest of the Torah. And Ha'azinu's Song and the SHIRAT HAYAM are written differently from each other.

The most common Sefer Torah today is written in 245 columns of 42 lines each.

Ha'azinu's Song is written in a Torah scroll on 70 lines, divided evenly (35+35) on the preantepenultimate and the antepenultimate columns of a Torah.

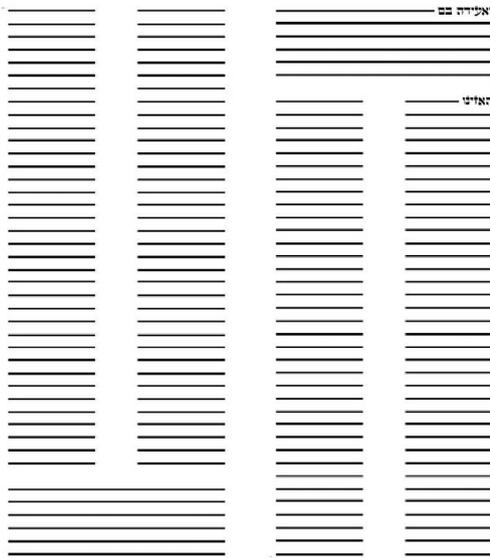
(I'm just showing off, but it makes for fun trivia knowledge. The last item of a group is the ultimate. Next-to-last is called penultimate. Those two are relatively well-known. Third to the last is antepenultimate. and fourth to last is preantepenultimate - that's an 18-letter word.)

The column which contains the first half of the song begins with the words V'A'IDA BAM ET HASHAMAYIM V'ET HAARETZ, from D'varim 31:28 towards the end of Vayeilech. Vayeilech and perek 31 finish on the top six lines of the V'A'IDA column. Then there is a line left blank and the first 35 lines of Ha'azinu finish the column. The second 35 lines continue on the top of the following column, followed by a blank line and then six more lines of the non-song text that continues Parshat Ha'azinu. The following column finishes Ha'azinu in 14 more lines. V'zot HaB'racha then finishes the whole Torah with the 28 remaining lines of the column and all 42 lines of the final (ultimate) column of the Torah.

If you have said "Huh?" at any of the above, I apologize - try rereading it, maybe a bit slower.

To further clarify: Ha'azinu's 52 p'sukim split (unevenly) into Song - 44 p'sukim on 70 lines in a Sefer Torah (the first 6 Aliyot of the sedra), and the remaining 8 p'sukim, regular (prose) text being Sh'VII. The last five of those p'sukim are reread for the Maftir.

Each line of the SHIRA (song) consists of a phrase, a blank space, and a phrase. The two columns of the SHIRA look like this:



A couple of comments on content of the beginning of the SHIRA.

Moshe Rabeinu calls upon Heaven and Earth to hear what he is about to say. A few p'sukim earlier, at the top of the Ha'azinu column, he calls upon Heaven and Earth to witness his words.

The second pasuk translates as: My lesson will drop like rain; my words will flow like dew; like storms on vegetation and like showers on grass.

Rain, dew, storm, shower - different intensities of falling water. Water is to the physical as Torah is to the spiritual. This is a wide-ranging analogy in many teachings. Here it indicates that different people handle Torah-learning differently. There are individuals who "learn up a storm". They spent most of their waking hours learning Torah extensively and intensely. There are others who have the time and can handle a shiur here and a shiur there. Some need the light touch of short divrei Torah. Some can learn on their own; others need guided lessons. Some can learn straight Gemara. Others use Artscroll or other translations and commentary. Torah is taught and learned on many different levels, just as rain and dew differ.

One more pasuk. KI SHEIM HASHEM EKRA... When I call out the name of G-d, ascribe greatness to our G-d. Among other things that are learned from this pasuk, is the practice of BENCHING MEZUMAN. If at least three men - or without three men, if there are at least three women - who are eating together, then one invites the others to say Birkat HaMazon together. ZIMUN ANASHIM is required - ZIMUN NASHIM is voluntary. The minimum of three for ZIMUN is

learned from this pasuk - When I (singular) call out... you (plural, minimum plural is two) ascribe greatness...

With no rest for the weary, Sukkot begins on the Monday evening following Shabbat Parshat Ha'azinu. Hopefully, the Sukka is ready to go, the Arba Minim have been acquired, guests for Yom Tov have been invited, wonderful Yom Tov meals have been prepared...

For Sukkot numbers, let's begin with the Korban Musaf of Chag (the generic term is also used specifically for Sukkot).

On the first day of Sukkot, in the Beit HaMikdash, the Musaf consists of 13 bulls, 2 rams, and 14 lambs - all OLOT (burnt offerings) plus a goat for a communal CHATAT (sin-offering).

The rams, lambs, and goat numbers are the same for all seven days of Chag; number of bulls decrease by one each day. For the seven days, there are $13+12+11+10+9+8+7 = 70$ - a number that corresponds to the iconic 70 Nations of the World. This lends a universal flavor to our holiday of Sukkot.

Aside from the unusual number of PARIM (bulls), the numbers of rams and lambs is also noteworthy. The standard numbers for the Musafim of Rosh Chodesh and the other Chagim (including Sh'mini Atzeret) is one ram (AYIL) and seven lambs (K'VASIM). On Sukkot, the rams and lambs are doubled.

This points to a dual nature of Sukkot. On the one hand, Sukkot is the third and final holiday of the SHALOSH REGALIM, the three Pilgrimage Festivals - Pesach, Shavuot, and Sukkot, each with its own agricultural significance and each with an inter-related history in the saga of Jewish Nationhood.

But Sukkot can also be seen as the third and final holiday of the three Tishrei Holy Days - Rosh HaShana, Yom Kippur, and Sukkot, each with a part of the story of T'SHUVA and atonement for national and individual sins. The obvious focus of the Yamim Nora'im (Days of Awe) are supplemented by the dimension of T'SHUVA MEI-AHAVA that accompanies the SIMCHA of Sukkot - and, specifically, HOSHANA RABBA.

We see a further hint to the dual nature of Sukkot in Parshat HaMoadim (the

portion of the Festivals in Vayikra 23). Verse 4 is the intro to the Chagim - These are G-d's appointed [holy days], holy occasions, which you shall designate in their appointed time:

This is followed by presentations of Pesach, the Omer period, Shavuot, Rosh HaShana, Yom Kippur, and Sukkot. Then verse 37, a summary statement: These are God's appointed [holy days] that you shall designate them as holy occasions... That's it - but not quite. Because verse 39 states: But on the fifteenth day of the seventh month, when you gather in the produce of the land, you shall celebrate the festival of G-d for a seven day period; the first day shall be a rest day, and the eighth day shall be a rest day. Followed by the mitzvot of Lulav & Etrog and Sukkot. Then another summary statement - verse 44 - And Moshe told the children of Israel [these laws] of G-d's appointed [holy days].

What? Sukkot again? And that is the point. Sukkot has two roles in the cycle of our holy days. It is truly Z'MAN SIMCHATEINU, the Time of Our Joy - because it combines the joy of the Exodus, of the Giving of the Torah, and of Return to G-d with joy - T'SHUVA MEI-AHAVA.

Wishing you all a SHABBAT SHALOM and a CHAG SAMEI'ACH.

JP - VAYEILECH - YOM KIPPUR

We've discussed this already, but let's look at it again from the perspective of Parshat Vayeilech.

Parshat Nitzavim is ALWAYS read on the last Shabbat of the year - the Shabbat right before Rosh HaShana. Sometimes, Nitzavim is read then on its own; sometimes it is combined with Vayeilech.

This means that Vayeilech is sometimes read on the last Shabbat of the year, and sometimes it is read on the first Shabbat - as it is this new year of 5786.

Actually, when Rosh HaShana is Shabbat and Sunday, then Vayeilech is read on the second Shabbat of the year.

Nitzavim & Vayeilech are combined 60.46% of years - when Rosh HaShana begins on Thursday or Shabbat.

Nitzavim and Vayeilech are read separately 39.54% of years - when Rosh HaShana begins on Monday or Tuesday.

Now here's the interesting trivia about Vayeilech. Because it can be the last Shabbat of the year and it can be the first Shabbat of the year, the following situation can occur.

Take this year 5785. Rosh HaShana 5785 was on Thursday and Friday (October 3-4). That means that Nitzavim and Vayeilech were read on the last Shabbat of 5784. The day after RH 5785 was Shabbat Shuva and the sedra we read was Ha'azinu. On the last Shabbat of 5785, we read only Nitzavim. RH 5786 was Tuesday and Wednesday (September 23-24). The first Shabbat of 5786, we read Vayeilech on Shabbat Shuva.

Do you realize what that meant for 5785? We read all sedras of the Torah during the year - except for Vayeilech. Actually, since we read the beginning of Vayeilech at Mincha on Shabbat - the first 13 p'sukim - it was only the last 17 p'sukim of Vayeilech that wasn't read at all during 5785. This happens almost 30% of the time.

But do not fret on Vayeilech's behalf. There are years when Vayeilech is read twice - once at the beginning and once at the end of the year. And this happens almost 30% of the time.

That makes Vayeilech different from all other sedras almost 60% of years.

And then there are years with Vayeilech read once - like all the other sedras. Sometimes at the beginning of the year (almost 10%) and sometimes only at year-end (a bit more than 30% of the time).

If that wasn't enough to explain why Vayeilech is different from all other sedras, look at its stats.

Vayeilech has only 30 p'sukim, making it the shortest sedra in the Torah pasuk-wise.

At the same time, Vayeilech has the longest p'sukim in all of the Torah - averaging more than 18 words (more than 70 letters) per pasuk. The Torah's average is 13.7 words / 52.14 letters per pasuk. Just for contrast, Mas'ei's p'sukim average 11 words / 44 letters per pasuk.

Alas, the longer p'sukim in Vayeilech only allow it to leave last place by one slot; because of its word and letter totals and the number of lines it is written on in a Sefer Torah, it beats out V'zot HaB'racha, but that's it. V'zot HaB'racha has 41 p'sukim, but only 512 words / 1989 letters.

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The six mitzvot in Ki Tavo brought the total of mitzvot in the Torah to 611. Nitzavim had none of the Taryag (even though it has the mitzva of T'shuva - a fact discussed in last week's column). The final two mitzvot are in Vayeilech - HAK-HEL and the mitzva to write a Sefer Torah.

HAK-HEL is a septennial event (that's once in seven years - just in case you didn't figure that out) taking place in the year following a Sh'mita year, on the first day of Chol HaMoed Sukkot, when all men, women, and children are commanded to come to the Beit HaMikdash Azara (courtyard) to witness the reading of parts of the Book of D'varim by the King of Israel. HAK-HEL is the

famous exception to the rule that women are exempt from time-related positive mitzvot (there are other exceptions).

HAK-HEL was and will be a major event meant to unify the people and the Sh'vatim (tribes) to which they belonged. It also honors the Torah before all of Israel. It was conducted with great pomp and ceremony. The Torah mitzva applies only when we have a King and the Beit HaMikdash.

Mitzva #613 (very appropriately) is the mitzva to write a Sefer Torah. The highest form of fulfilling this mitzva would be actually writing your own Torah. Second to that, would be commissioning a sofer to write a Sefer Torah on your behalf. Even writing and/or commissioning a word or a letter in a Sefer Torah is a fulfillment of the mitzva to write a Sefer Torah.

Sources point out that the Torah does not only says to write a Torah but it gives a reason for writing it - V'LAMDAH ET B'NEI YISRAEL... and teach it to the people of Israel... From this they teach that in our time, when learning and teaching Torah is done with various texts, then it is also in the spirit of this mitzva to acquire Sifrei Kodesh (holy books) with intent to learn and teach from them.

Rabbeinu Asher (a.k.a. the ROSH, Rabbi Asher ben Yechiel, 1250?-1327) presents a novel twist on the mitzva of writing a Sefer Torah. He says that since the Torah scroll has ceased its function as the text for learning and in our time is used rather for public reading, and that sacred texts - Chumashim, Mishna, Gemara, Rambam, Shulchan Aruch... etc. etc. and etc. - are used for Torah learning, THE MAIN fulfillment of the mitzva to write a Sefer Torah is the building of a Torah Library (in order to learn from it). And if a person is also privileged to write or commission a Sefer Torah, that's good too.

So, the next time you buy a Sefer - a Gemara with English translation and commentaries or a book of the Laws of Shabbat... and so on and so forth - have in mind that you are fulfilling the mitzva to Write a Torah, mitzva #613 of the Torah. And, of course - learn from it and teach others, if you can.

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Yom Kippur's being on Thursday is the rarest of the four possibilities, occurring

only 11.51% of years. The last time we had Thursday Yom Kippur was four years ago; the next scheduled one is 20 years from now.

(Note well, that with the restoration of a Sanhedrin and its roll in the Calendar, the days of the week for YK cannot necessarily be predicted in advance.)

The number best associated with Yom Kippur is FIVE (5). Every weekday of the year, we daven three times a day. On Shabbat, Rosh Chodesh, and Yamim Tovim (holydays) we have four davenings. Only on Yom Kippur, do we have five - Maariv (a.k.a. Arvit), Shacharit, Musaf, Mincha - and NE'ILA.

The other 5 of YK are the INUYIM, the Afflictions that are obligatory on the 10th of the seventh month, i.e. Tishrei. Not eating or drinking, not washing or bathing (except for cleaning away actual dirt), no use of lotions or cosmetics (unscented deodorant is permitted), no wearing of leather shoes, no marital relations.

VIDUI, the formal verbal confession (which should be supplemented by your own sincere words - in any language). This included the 24 terms of sinning (some specific and some general category) - ASHAMNU, BAGADNU... and the 44 AL CHEITs (for the sins we have committed before You) plus another set of V'AL HACHATA'IM...

VIDUI is an important component of the T'shuva process (repentance) - sometimes being the culmination of the process (following Realization that you have sinned, stopping that sinful act or behavior, regret for the past violations, and acceptance for the future not to repeat the sin). But sometimes, VIDUI or even a word or line therein, can be the trigger to the T'shuva process. Saying the name of a sin - and/or reading a footnote or comment about it, can lead to the realization that you have T'shuva to do.

To be sure, one feels trepidation during the Days of Awe and on Yom Kippur particularly. But there is also a special joy mixed with the awe and fear of the day - the joy or realization that G-d wants our repentance; He does not want to punish us.

**SHABBAT SHALOM • G'MAR VACHATIMA TOVA • SHANA TOVA UMTUKA**

May this new year of 5786 be a peaceful, healthy, prosperous year for the People of Israel as a whole and for each individual as well.

## **JP - NITZAVIM - ROSH HASHANA**

As was mentioned (okay, more than mentioned) last week, Parshat Nitzavim is ALWAYS read on the last Shabbat of the year - the Shabbat right before Rosh HaShana. Sometimes, Nitzavim is read then on its own; sometimes it is combined with Vayeilech.

Nitzavim is combined with Vayeilech when the upcoming RH is on Thursday (& Friday) or Shabbat (& Sunday). This is so because there is just one more Shabbat available for a Parshat HaShavua until Simchat Torah when we will be reading V'zot HaB'racha and beginning B'reishit. So Ha'azinu, the penultimate sedra of the Torah will be read on Shabbat Shuva (the Shabbat between RH and Yom Kippur) and then we are ready to finish the cycle and begin it anew on Simchat Torah.

But, when RH is Monday (& Tuesday) or Tuesday (& Wednesday, as in 5786 - coming up fast), then we need to split Nitzavim and Vayeilech, so that Vayeilech will be read on Shabbat Shuva and Ha'azinu will be read on the Shabbat between Yom Kippur and Sukkot. With the year beginning on a Thursday or Shabbat, there is no Shabbat between YK & Sukkot.

Nitzavim & Vayeilech are combined 60.46% of years.

Nitzavim and Vayeilech are read separately 39.54% of years.

The usually combined Matot-Mas'ei will split occasionally to allow Nitzavim to bring us into Rosh HaShana.

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And now to Nitzavim.

It's the 51st of the 54 sedras; the 8th of the 11 in D'varim

It is written on 87 lines in a Torah (rank: 52); only two sedras take up fewer lines in a Sefer Torah - Vayeilech and V'zot HaB'racha.

The sedra is composed of 4 parshiyot - 1 open (P'TUCHA) and 3 closed

(S'TUMA).

Nitzavim has only 40 p'sukim - the second shortest sedra, pasuk-wise. Only its sometimes partner Vayeilech has fewer (30).

Interestingly though, its p'sukim are the second longest in the Torah in words and letters (Vayeilech's are the longest). This makes it longer than Ha'azinu and V'zot HaB'racha, in addition to Vayeilech.

Ha'azinu, written in a Torah in special form of a SHIR, has a lot of blank spaces, which keeps it longer than Nitzavim in number of lines in a Torah.

Bottom line (pun sort of intended), Nitzavim is one of the four shortest sedras of the Torah's 54.

It may be short, but it is packed with important concepts and messages.

Remember: it is ALWAYS the sedra that brings us into Rosh HaShana - either by itself (like this year) or together with Vayeilech.

One of the main points of Parshat Nitzavim is the mitzva of T'SHUVA, Repentance. D'varim 30:2 states -

V'SHAVTA AD HASHEM ELOKECHA... And you will RETURN to HaShem, your God, with all your heart and with all your soul, and you will listen to His voice according to all that I am commanding you this day you and your children...

Certainly, this is a main reason for Nitzavim's 'task' of bringing us into Rosh HaShana and the Yamim Nora'im (the Days of Awe).

Briefly, T'shuva can be described as having five components:

(1) Recognizing that what you have done (once or repeatedly, intentionally or inadvertently) is wrong, is a sin.

(2) Stopping to do it. (Or starting to do it, if the sin was non-fulfillment of a positive mitzva.)

(3) Sincere regret for having sinned.

(4) Acceptance for the future not to continue sinning.

(5) VIDUI - verbal confession (to G-d). VIDUI is sometimes the culmination of the T'shuva process - and sometimes it is the first step, which puts a person on the path to T'shuva.

Obviously, all of the above needs elaboration and a lot of effort on our part. But not for this column.

Also, keep in mind that interpersonal sins (BEIN ADAM LACHAVEIRO) also require one to seek forgiveness from the offended party in addition to forgiveness from HaShem.

One more thing to keep in mind: Don't be discouraged if your T'shuva is not complete; your good intentions and partial success are important - just keep at it.

With all this said (and all that was not said), there is a glaring point to be made about the mitzva of T'shuva:

Neither the Rambam nor the Sefer HaChinuch count any mitzvot from Parshat Nitzavim. T'shuva is not on the list of the Taryag (613) mitzvot, for either of these two most famous mitzva-counters. Puzzling.

Rambam Hilchot T'shuva begins with the following statement: IF a person sins... WHEN he does T'shuva and repents... the process must include verbal confession - this VIDUI is a mitzva in the Torah (counted from Parshat Naso).

The Rambam's view of T'shuva seems to be that it is a G-d-given opportunity which a person should take, rather than a command. Certainly, T'shuva is a mitzva, but he doesn't count it among the 613.

Another way to look at T'shuva is as an add-on to all mitzvot, rather than a mitzva standing on its own. Forbidden to violate the Shabbat. But if you do, you have to repent and not do it anymore. T'shuva is part of the mitzvot of Shabbat. So too with all mitzvot.

T'shuva is a very important mitzva - just not numbered among Taryag - it is a supra-mitzva (and a super-mitzva); use it well.

Concepts in Nitzavim and elsewhere, that are essential if a command to repent is to have meaning, include Reward & Punishment, Free Will, and the accompanying Accountability we humans have for our actions.

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**What happened to Rosh Chodesh Benching? Not for Tishrei. Its Rosh Chodesh is eclipsed by Rosh HaShana. In davening, there are a couple of references to Rosh HaShana's being also Rosh Chodesh, but it is not a focus of the day.**

**From the pasuk (T'hilim 81:4) - TIKU BACHODESH SHOFAR BAKEISEH L'YOM CHAGEINU - Blow the Shofar on the new moon (Rosh Chodesh Tishrei), on the moon's covering, for our festival day (Rosh HaShana). Reference to KESEH - KISUI, covering, also explains our not announcing it in advance.**

**Nonetheless, the molad (new moon) of Tishrei is most important for fixing our calendar today, temporarily without a Sanhedrin (which used the knowledge of the molad to know how to question witnesses to the first visibility of the lunar crescent).**

**The molad of Tishrei 5786 is on Monday (September 22nd, our Erev Rosh HaShana), 10 minutes and 7 parts (a bit more than 23 seconds) after 12 noon.**

**The rule for our fixed calendar is that Rosh HaShana is on the day of the molad, unless the molad is after noon. The molad is then called a MOLAD ZAKEIN (an old molad) and RH is fixed for the following day. Hence, Rosh HaShana 5786 is Tuesday and Wednesday. (There are other situations that will bump RH to the day following Tishrei's molad - not for now.)**

**Ironic, that we announce all the other moladot of the year (which do tell us things), but not the most important one for the calendar. We might not announce it, but we calculate it and use it well.**

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Rosh HaShana's being on Tuesday-Wednesday is the rarest of the four possibilities, occurring only 11.51% of years. The last time we had Tuesday-Wednesday RH was four years ago; the next scheduled one is 20 years from now.

(Note well, that with the restoration of a Sanhedrin and its roll in the Calendar, the days of the week for RH cannot necessarily be predicted in advance.)

Number-wise, RH has (at least) two areas of interest.

Our weekday Amida has 19 brachot; the Amida of Shabbat and Chagim has 7 brachot. The musaf of RH (each day) has 9 brachot.

The first three and last three brachot of the Musaf Amida are the same as always (with additions and one crucial ending-change for the ten days from RH through YK). The middle three brachot are unique.

They are called MALCHIYOT - consisting of text and p'sukim - 10 in number - concerning G-d's Kingship.

The second is ZICHRONOT - text and p'sukim focusing on Rememberances, including His promise to No'ach, His taking us out of Egypt, and more.

The third theme is SHOFAROT - again, text and p'sukim about events in which a Shofar plays a role.

The other number-thing of RH, is, of course, Shofar-blowing.

The Torah commands us to hear the Shofar on RH with a slightly vague wording - YOM T'RU'A TIHYEH LACHEM - You shall have a T'RU'A DAY (on the first of Tishrei (and, by Rabbinic decree, on the second day, as well).

The Torah's command is to here the sound called T'RU'A - three times, each time to be preceded and followed by a P'SHUTA (a long monotone blast which we call T'KI'A).

Because of the uncertainty of what a T'RU'A sound is, we have, what we call a

SH'VARIM, a T'RU'A, and the combination SH'VARIM-T'RU'A. Each of which has a T'KI'A before and after it.

This requirement results in, what we call, 30 KOLOT. That's three TASHRATs (T'KI'A, SH'VARIM-T'RU'A, T'KI'A), three TASHATs (T'KI'A, SH'VARIM, T'KI'A), and three TARATs (T'KI'A, T'RU'A, T'KI'A).

These thirty blasts of the Shofar are considered to be the fulfillment of the Torah's mitzva of YOM T'RU'A TIHYEH LACHEM.

Our Sages discussed and debated whether the 30 KOLOT should be sounded at one time or should be divided among the three theme-brachot of the Musaf Amida.

So we do both. We make the brachot and blow a full set of thirty blasts after the haftara and before Musaf. Then we blow 10 KOLOT (one each of TASHRAT, TASHAT, TARAT) for each of MALCHIYOT, ZICHRONOT, and SHOFAROT.

In which Amida - the silent one or the repetition?

Everyone agrees on the repetition, CHAZARAT HASHATZ. Some also blow during the silent Amida.

Those who do so, will hear 30 before Musaf, 30 during the silent Amida. And 30 during the repetition.

Those who don't blow during the silent Amida, will hear a total of 60 KOLOT.

Our Sages decreed that we should hear 100 Shofar-blasts on each day of Rosh HaShana. To accomplish this, the 90 communities will add ten more blasts (one small set) after the repetition of the Amida, and the 60-shuls will add 40 KOLOT after the Repetition.

The weaving of the Shofar blasts and the davening add meaning to both.

When Shofar is blown for a homebound person, thirty KOLOT are sufficient to fulfill the Torah's mitzva.

There is more - oh, so much more. But alas...

SHABBAT SHALOM • K'TIVA VACHATIMA TOVA • SHANA TOVA UMTUKA*

*** The Kotzker Rebbe would explain the significance of the word UMTUKA (and sweet) in the greeting for the new year. SHANA TOVA, asking HaShem that the coming year should be GOOD is fine, but everything that HaShem does is GOOD and for the GOOD. Including things that we perceive as not so good for us. So we ask HaShem that the Good Year should also be SWEET for us.**

JP - KI TAVO

This Shabbat, we read Parshat Ki Tavo and Ashkenazim begin saying Slichot this year, on this Motza'ei Shabbat (or Sunday morning), i.e. Motza"Sh of Parshat Ki Tavo.

S'faradim - Eidot Mizrach have been saying Slichot since Tuesday, the 2nd of Elul.

Here's the story...

Although S'fardim (EIDOT MIZRACH) say S'lichot throughout the month of Elul, Ashkenazim say S'lichot for a minimum of four days before Rosh HaShana. Furthermore, Ashkenazim always start S'lichot on a Motza'ei Shabbat (or early Sunday morning).

Parshat Nitzavim is ALWAYS read on the last Shabbat of the year - the Shabbat right before Rosh HaShana. Sometimes, Nitzavim is read then on its own; sometimes it is combined with Vayeilech.

This means that Ki Tavo is always the next-to-the-last (penultimate) Shabbat of the year. Nitzavim is the buffer between Ki Tavo and its harsh, depressing TOCHACHA - not a good choice to bring us into Rosh HaShana and the Yamim Nora'im. Nitzavim has a much more uplifting and encouraging tone. It takes us into RH nicely.

Because of LO ADU ROSH, there are three days of the week that Rosh HaShana's first day cannot fall on - four days of the week that it can:

Monday, Tuesday, Thursday, Shabbat.

When RH is Thursday-Friday (31.89% of years), then the previous Shabbat is Nitzavim-Vayeilech combined, and S'lichot begins on Motza'ei Shabbat of NV, giving us four days S'lichot (which is three days plus Erev Rosh HaShana, on which we say a much longer set of S'lichot).

When RH is Shabbat-Sunday (28.57% of years), then the previous Shabbat is Nitzavim-Vayeilech combined, and S'lichot begins on Motza'ei Shabbat of NV,

giving us six days S'lichot (five days plus Erev Rosh HaShana).

When RH is Monday-Tuesday (28.03% of years), then the previous Shabbat is Nitzavim on its own but if S'lichot were to begin on that Motza"Sh, there would only be one day of S'lichot. So S'lichot begins on Motza'ei Shabbat one Shabbat earlier - Motza'ei Shabbat of Ki Tavo, giving us seven days of S'lichot (six plus Erev RH).

When RH is Tuesday-Wednesday (as it is this year, an 11.51% occurrence), then the previous Shabbat is Nitzavim on its own but if S'lichot were to begin on that Motza"Sh, there would only be two day of S'lichot. So S'lichot begins on Motza'ei Shabbat one Shabbat earlier - Motza'ei Shabbat of Ki Tavo, giving us eight days of S'lichot (seven plus Erev RH).

Nitzavim & Vayeilech are combined 60.46% of years. The following Shabbat is Shabbat Shuva of the new year, and we read Ha'azinu.

Nitzavim and Vayeilech are read separately 39.54% of years. The following Shabbat is Shabbat Shuva of the new year, and we read Vayeilech. Ha'azinu is read on the Shabbat between Yom Kippur and Sukkot.

In all years, the calendar (so to speak) is ready for V'zot HaB'racha on Simchat Torah.

And here's Ki Tavo by the numbers (and more)...

Ki Tavo is the 50th of the 54 sedras in the Torah. That means there are only four more sedras to read before we complete the current round of reading through the Torah:

Nitzavim (40 p'sukim), next Shabbat, the last Shabbat of 5785.

Vayeilech (30 p'sukim), Shabbat Shuva of 5786 (HA"L - HABAA ALEINU L'TOVA).

Ha'azinu (52 p'sukim) on the Shabbat between Yom Kippur and Sukkot.

And V'zot HaB'racha (41 p'sukim) which we will read on Simchat Torah

(Tuesday, October 14th in Israel; Wednesday, October 15th in Chutz LaAretz).

Nitzavim, Vayeilech, and Ha'azinu total 122 p'sukim - the same as Ki Tavo.

Add V'zot HaB'racha, and the four last sedras of the Torah have 163 p'sukim among them, fewer p'sukim than either Naso or Pinchas, the two longest sedras.

Ki Tavo has 21 parshiyot (5 open and 16 closed). Not the most, but significantly above average (which is about 12.5 parshiyot per sedra). This means that there are blank spaces which result in Ki Tavo's 233 lines in a Sefer Torah ranking 13th, compared with the 122 p'sukim earning it 17th place p'sukim-wise, tied with Vayakhel and Va'etchanan.

Ki Tavo's p'sukim are longer than average, but short for the Book of D'varim.

Speaking of p'sukim, the distribution of p'sukim among the seven aliyot is remarkable. The seven aliya have 11, 4, 4, 10, 22, 63, 8 p'sukim, respectively.

Shishi contains the TOCHACHA, the harsh rebuke and warning against abandoning Torah and Mitzvot. The practice is to contain the rebuke (here in Ki Tavo and in B'chukotai) within a single aliya. This results in the longest (63 p'sukim) of the Torah's 378 aliyot (not counting R'VI'I of the combined Matot-Mas'ei, 72 p'sukim).

Mitzvot: Let's put things into perspective. The previous three sedras were loaded with mitzvot. Shof'tim 41, R'ei 55, Ki Teitzei 74 - for a total of 170 mitzvot. The following 18 sedras - four more in D'varim, all 12 in B'reishit, and the first two sedras of Sh'mot has a total of 5 mitzvot.

And Ki Tavo's six mitzvot (3 positive & 3 prohibitions) sounds low, but actually, there are 22 sedras with more mitzvot, Pinchas with 6 also, and 30 sedras with fewer mitzvot.

Note too, that the six mitzvot in Ki Tavo are all in the first 19 p'sukim of the sedra. That's a little more than 15% of the sedra. In fact, in the Vilna Gaon's analysis of the Book of D'varim, he presents Sho-f'tim, R'ei, Ki Teitzei, and the first part of Ki Tavo as the middle of three sections in the Book.

Let's look at the first of Ki Tavo's mitzvot - BIKURIM part TWO.

BIKURIM part ONE - the mitzva to bring the first fruits of the Seven Species to the Beit HaMikdash - is commanded in half a pasuk back in Parshat Mishpatim. The exact same pasuk is repeated in Parshat Ki Tisa. (The other half of the pasuk, each time, is Do not cook a G'DI in the milk of its mother.)

In this week's sedra we find the mitzva - counted separately among Taryag (the 613 mitzvot), commanding the Bikurim-bringer to recite the special Bikurim portion made famous by the Pesach Hagada.

And you shall call out and say before the Lord, your God, "An Aramean [sought to] destroy my forefather, and he went down to Egypt and sojourned there with a small number of people, and there, he became a great, mighty, and numerous nation. And the Egyptians treated us cruelly and afflicted us, and they imposed hard labor upon us. So we cried out to the Lord, God of our fathers, and the Lord heard our voice and saw our affliction, our toil, and our oppression. And the Lord brought us out from Egypt with a strong hand and with an outstretched arm, with great awe, and with signs and wonders. And He brought us to this place, and He gave us this land, a land flowing with milk and honey.

It is said of Bikurim: "Do this mitzva, for in its merit you will enter the Land." The ARI HaKadosh singles out Bikurim as the mitzva which is the TIKUN (repair) for the Sin of the Spies. Bikurim has a Torah-commanded, built-in recitation that helps us focus our thoughts in a particular direction. With this recitation, the Jew identifies himself with his Jewish Heritage and announces to one and all the centrality of Eretz Yisrael in G-d's plans for the People of Israel. Bikurim makes the statement that we are glad to be here. Being happy about being in Eretz Yisrael grants us the Z'CHUT to be here. Joyfully thanking G-d for our being here helps "repair" the opposite attitude as expressed by the 10 spies and echoed by the panicked multitude. The Sin of the Spies was committed by what the Meraglim SAID, and it was while they were displaying fruits of Eretz Yisrael, no less. Bikurim is the mitzva that is performed by what the Bikurim bringer SAYS (in addition to bringing the fruits), and while he displays fruits that he brought from the Land. "A perfect match!" (in opposites).

Rav Menachem Zemba HY"D added a beautiful note to the above notion that Bikurim is the positive counterpart to CHEIT HAMERAGLIM. Look in Mishna, Bikurim 3:1 - How does one designate his Bikurim? A person goes into his fields and sees a ripe fig, a ripe cluster of grapes, a ripe pomegranate... The Mishna uses as an example of Bikurim, the very same three fruits that the Meraglim brought with them to show to the People. A perfect exclamation point to the statement of the ARI z"l.

Bikurim is a prime example of HAKARAT HATOV, recognition and acknowledgment of the good that G-d does for us. We must apply this lesson to other areas of mitzvot and life in general. Do all mitzvot with the recognition that we are part of the Nation that HaShem chose as His. That SIMCHA is (should be) part of every mitzva we perform.

May we soon be privileged to bring Bikurim with all the joy and Jewish pride that says that we are truly pleased to be chosen by G-d as His People and that we are genuinely thankful for this wonderful Land.

The first four p'sukim of the Bikurim recitation form the main text for the Pesach Seder's MAGID section; they summarize Egyptian enslavement and the subsequent Exodus. The fifth pasuk (which is not in the Hagada) speaks of coming to Eretz Yisrael. This corresponds to the fifth term of redemption and is represented by Eliyahu's cup, which we don't yet drink, and a number of other Seder elements.

Shabbat Shalom and a meaningful S'lichot period

JP - KI TEITZEI

Interesting numbers for Parshat Ki Teitzei. As for as size is concerned, it is fairly average. In fact, p'sukim-wise, it is very much so. There are 5846 p'sukim in the Torah. Dividing by 54, we find that the average length (in p'sukim) of a sedra is 108.26 p'sukim per sedra. Ki Teitzei has 110 p'sukim and ranks 28th among all sedras - the closest to the average.

Word-wise, it rises to 23rd place; letter-wise it drops back to 26th. If you count lines in a Sefer Torah, Ki Teitzei rises to 21st place. All-in-all, it is an average-size sedra.

But in other respects, it is number one!

As you might know, in a Sefer Torah, there are no perek, pasuk, or sedra indications. The only breaks in a Torah are between Chumash and Chumash (four blank lines) and between parsha and parsha. Those breaks come in two forms, as there are two types of parshiyot.

A Parsha P'tucha (open parsha) begins on a new line. On the previous line, after the previous parsha ends, the rest of the line is left blank. A Parsha S'tuma (closed parsha) begins on the same line as the previous parsha ends, with a blank space between the parshiyot.

There are 674 parshiyot in the Torah; 295 P'tuchot, 379 S'tumot.

And Ki Teitzei has more parshiyot than any other sedra. 44 parshiyot (ranks 1), only 2 P'tuchot and 42 S'tumot (ranks 1). All the blank spaces in Ki Teitzei explain the rise in rank for lines in a Sefer Torah.

And now, we come to mitzvot.

Ki Teitzei is number one, by far. 74 mitzvot - that's 12.1% of the Torah's 613. 27 positives (ranks 1); prohibitions (ranks 1).

And here's a new stat: Mitzva density (MD) - mitzvot per 1000 p'sukim. With 613 mitzvot in the Torah's 5846, the MD of the whole Torah is $613/5846 \times 1000 = 104.86$ - about 105.

Ki Teitzei has an expected high MD - 673. But that gives it only second place. The number one MD sedra is K'doshim. It 'only' has 51 mitzva (number 5 on the all time mitzva list) but it is a small sedra, only 64 p'sukim. This gives it an MD of 797.

The number of mitzvot and parshiyot in Ki Teitzei paint a picture of Moshe Rabeinu realizing his time left in this world is soon to end and he seems to need to pick up the pace of his teaching and review of mitzvot of all types - between the Jew and HaShem, interpersonal mitzvot, those related to the Land of Israel and those more universal, positive commands, prohibitions...

Let's take a look at some of the mitzvot which are remarkable for various reasons.

There is a phenomenon with some mitzvot, where the context in the Written Word of the Torah is narrow, but the explanation in the Oral Law broadens the scope of the mitzva significantly.

• We find a trio of mitzvot in the sedra which deals with someone guilty of, tried, convicted and executed for, a capital offense (idolatry or public & spiteful desecration of Shabbat - for example). The body is to be hung on a post (postmortem) for a short period before sunset (mitzvat ASEI - positive mitzva for the court). It is forbidden to leave the body hanging over night (LO TAASEI - prohibition). The body is then to be buried (another ASEI).

It seems, from the Written Torah, that these mitzvot concern the executed capital offender. However, the Oral Law - Torah she-b'al peh - the mitzva to bury the dead applies to all Jewish dead. And this is NOT merely a Rabbinic extension of the Torah's Law - it is a full d'Oraita (Torah Law) requirement. We also are taught that burial of the dead should be unduly delayed.

How do we know that burial of the dead is a Torah Mitzva? Can't we argue that the Torah is only talking about the executed felon?

The answer, simply put is EMUNAT CHACHAMIM - our complete trust, confidence, belief in the Chain of Tradition, unbroken from Moshe's receiving the Torah at Sinai (not just on the day of Matan Torah, but for the forty days

and forty nights that Moshe spent on Har Sinai learning all of the Torah and Mitzvot and explanations from HaShem), generation after generation... until this very day... and beyond.

This belief is so complete that it becomes our knowledge. It includes Torah min HaShamayim (that the Torah was given to us by G-d), and that it consists of the Written Word, the Oral Law (as transmitted by our Sages), and Rabbinic Law (as legislated by the Sanhedrin generation after generation. That is the Package Deal we have with G-d.

• Here's tetrad (that's a quartet, but I chose tetrad because it is the road less taken) of Ki Teitzei mitzvot:

Prohibition not to leave a fellow's beast of burden collapsed under its weight, but rather (positive mitzva) to help unload a fellow's animal (or self).

Not to harness to incompatible animals for any task (plowing is the Torah's example).

Not to muzzle an animal when it is working with food.

These mitzvot form the foundation to the whole volume of Torah and Rabbinic literature dealing with Avoiding Cruelty to Animals.

In order for this to be so, presupposes that Chazal (our Sages) were (almost) sure that the mitzvot above are examples of G-d's kindness to animals. Even though the Torah does not give reasons for those mitzvot, Chazal are confident with the reasons they attribute to them.

But not for all mitzvot. A different pair of mitzvot in Ki Teitzei deal with SHILU'ACH HAKEN, the prohibition of taking eggs or fledglings from a nest in the mother's presence and the positive command of chasing away the mother bird before taking the eggs or fledglings. (It's more complicated than that, but for now, we have enough.)

Is SHILU'ACH HAKEN also a demonstration of G-d's teaching us Kindness to Animals? Basically, not at all. The mishna - in two places - says that if a person petitions HaShem to show us mercy as he displays for the mother bird -

MASHTIKIN OTO, you silence such a person.

Simply put, not all mitzvot that might seem to have a component of mercy, are actually so. We cannot always understand reasons for mitzvot. Sometimes, we can, often we cannot. An important lesson about Torah & Mitzvot.

• One more trio of mitzvot. At the very end of the sedra, we find the three-pasuk portion we also know as Parshat Zachor. The portion contains three mitzvot of the 613.

Remember what Amalek did..., Wipe out Amalek, and never forget.

Chazal defined the mitzva to remember Amalek as the public Torah reading of Parshat Zachor (on the Shabbat before Purim).

LO TISH-KACH, do not forget is basically always.

TIMCHEH, wipe out Amalek - this is generally considered an obligation of the People of Israel, rather than a command to individuals.

Beneath the surface of ZACHOR & LO TISH-KACH is something else very important to remember and not to forget. We need to ponder the reason that Amalek was able to attack us. An insight as to what, can be seen in the topics that immediately precede the Amalek portions - the one here in Ki Teitzei and the one at the end of Parshat B'shalach.

In this week's sedra, the Amalek portion is preceded by the description of violations that are abominations in G-d's eyes - specifically, even the possession (let alone the use) of false weights and measures. Sum it up as cheating one's fellows in business. TO'EIVA, abomination.

Before the VAYAVO AMALEK portion at the end of B'shalach, we find the terrible complaints of Bnei Yisrael at Refidim - Why did you take us out of Egypt to kill us, our children... with thirst.

Take them together and you find serious lack of proper BEIN ADAM LAMAKOM and BEIN ADAM L'CHAVEIRO behavior.

Bottom line of this mitzva-laden sedra, and of the entire Torah:

Be faithful to the Torah & Mitzvot and life will be good... and if not -

Shabbat Shalom

JP - SHO-F'TIM

Just at the one-year mark in my current home... and still unpacking boxes - mostly s'farim and books, CDs and games. Found SEFER GIMATRIYOT which lists all the unique words in Tanach in their gimatriya order.

Thought I'd share a few G-facts with you. The words with the smallest gimatriya in the Tanach are AV and BA, weighing in at 3.

The Torah word with the largest gimatriya is TISTAREIR (TAV SIN TAV REISH REISH) in Bamidbar 16:13, in Parshat Korach; spoken by Datan and Aviram in a tirade against Moshe Rabeinu.

Only three other words in Tanach - all in the Book of Ezra - have larger gimatriyas, all with the same name - AR-TACH-SHAS-TA, a Persian Emperor, the third son of Xerxes (Achashveirosh) and was raised to the throne by Artabanus, the murderer of Xerxes. Shortly after his accession, Artaxerxes put his older brother Darius to death; and a little later, Artabanus, who perhaps aimed to make himself king, was killed.

Not a nice person. L'AR-TACH-SHAS-TA has the largest gimatriya of any word in Tanach - 1640.

I then went page by page to find the smallest number (besides 1 and 2) that is not the gimatriya of any word in the Tanach. It is 969! Every number from 3-968 is the gimatriya of a word or words in Tanach. The other numbers until 1000 that are not the gimatriyas of any word are 979, 983, 987, 989, and 993. Some numbers are the gimatriya for over 40 unique words in Tanach.

In the time of Sanhedrin, when the calendar was set each month by a proclamation of the head of Sanhedrin based on testimony of witnesses to the first visibility of the Lunar crescent, HA-L'VANA B'CHIDUSHA, month could each have 29 or 30 days. Communities in Eretz Yisrael were usually notified with enough time to know when Pesach, Yom Kippur, or Sukkot would be. Hence, one day Yom Tov was observed in Israel. Communities

outside of Israel often did not receive notification about exactly when Rosh Chodesh was within enough time to fix the Yom Tov. They most often had to observe two days Yom Tov based on SAFEIK, doubt as to which day was supposed to be Yom Tov.

Shavuot was not a problem, because it is observed on the 50th day following the counting of the Omer.

In our fixed calendar of today, there is no doubt as to which day Yom Tov is. Yet, the practice of one day in Israel and two days outside, still apply. We will not, at this moment, discuss the issue of who keeps one day and who keeps two.

But all of this is just introductory to the issue of Elul. The problem in the past (and future), when Sanhedrin sanctifies a specific day as Rosh Chodesh Tishrei, there would be no time to inform communities in or out of Israel. Rosh HaShana would already have begun.

Imagine that it is the 29th of Elul (when Sanhedrin calls the shots monthly), if witnesses see the new moon on the evening following 29 Elul, and they go to the Sanhedrin headquarters to testify, and their testimony is accepted - then in the morning (or sometimes later in the day), the day will be sanctified as Rosh Chodesh and the previous night will have been the start of the Yom Tov of Rosh HaShana.

So what were people supposed to do on that previous night? Light candles because it might turn out to be Rosh HaShana? Daven for Yom Tov? Make Kiddush. And then in the morning, daven and blow Shofar - all the time not knowing if the day is actually R"H or not.

And if witnesses don't show up - maybe because the moon wasn't visible or because it was cloudy all over Israel, then the day that might have been R"H would actually be the 30th of Elul and the following night and day would be Rosh HaShana.

Messy situation. So a long, long time ago, the Sages declared that Elul

would have 29 days. And the two days that followed would be Rosh HaShana - even in Israel. One of the days would be the Torah day of Rosh HaShana and the other would be Rosh HaShana by Rabbinic decree. This way, people can put their heart into observing Yom HaDin without having to wonder.

In our fixed calendar, we consider the first of Tishrei to be the Torah day of R"H and the second to be d'Rabbanan. But both days have K'dushat Yom Tov with full davening and Shofar both days.

Believe it or not, as confusing as the above might have been, it is even more complicated than presented.

Before we get into the numbers of this week's sedra, let's take a look at the correct pronunciation of its name. Most people (especially, native English speakers) will say SHOF-TIM, separating the syllables as SHOF and TIM and accenting the first syllable. SHOF-tim. Wrong on two counts. First of all, the first syllable is SHO with the SH'VA under the FEI being NA, not NACH. That means that instead of closing the first syllable (making it SHOF), it rather is attached to the second syllable, which becomes F'TIM. With a SH'VA NACH (which it isn't here), the FEI would only have the consonant sound (like an F in English) and no vowel sound at all. But as it is a SH'VA NA, there is a very slight vowel sound to the FEI, which is more than the English FTIM would indicate and less than FETIM would sound like. The apostrophe (affectionately referred to by some as a Shmichik) works best in transliteration.

Furthermore, the accent is on the second (last) syllable, making the correct sounding of the name of the sedra - sho-F'TIM.

That opening word of the sedra (judges) is followed by rhyming word v'sho-T'RIM (deputies), with the same fine-tuning as above. The VAV/SH'VA is not strong enough to stand alone as a syllable, but it is joined to the sho as v'sho. Again, the TET does not close the first syllable but rather is attached to the RIM. The words together are sho-F'TIM v'sho-T'RIM.

Another sedra-name that is like this on is to-L'DOT.

The stats for Sho-f'tim are interesting. Let's start with lines in a Sefer Torah. The most common Sefer Torah contains 245 columns with 42 lines per column. Four lines are left blank between Chumashim and a blank line precedes and follows the Song of the Sea (AZ YASHIR) and the Ha'azinu Song. There are 10, 274 lines in a Sefer Torah. Divide that by 54 sedras and each sedra averages a bit more than 190 lines. Sho-f'tim is written on 191.6 lines and ranks 27th in length (based on lines). Note that 27th is the bottom of the first half.

The sedra only has 97 (relatively long) p'sukim, tied with Tzav and ranked 36th. Significant drop. Word-wise, it rises again to 28th (the first of the second half of the list. And letter-wise, it drops to 31st place.

Sho-f'tim contains 41 of the 613 mitzvot of the Torah, with only five sedras having more mitzvot (K'doshim 51, Mishpatim 53, R'ei 55, Emor 63, Ki Teitzei 74).

The sedra deals (in part) with different types of authority - Judges, Sanhedrin, Kings, Prophets. And many different topics. But let me focus on a pair of mitzvot that are a window to a whole category of Mitzva and Halacha.

D'varim 17:11 - "According to the law they instruct you and according to the judgment they tell you, you shall do; you shall not divert from the word they tell you, neither right nor left."

This mitzva-pair is the Torah's command that requires us to follow Rabbinic Law. Specifically, there are Seven Mitzvot d'Rabbanan plus countless Rabbinic laws and details, which are all part of the "Package Deal" of Torah - The Written Word, the Oral Law, Rabbinic halacha, Tradition, Custom.

The Seven Rabbinic Mitzvot are Shabbat and Yom Tov Candles, Chanuka

Candles, Megilat Esther (and the other Megilot), Netilat Yadayim, Hallel, Eiruv (the three kinds - T'chum, Chatzeirot, Tavshilin) - and B'rachot (all types - food, fragrance, sight, sound, Mitzvot, prayer...).

The first six of the seven each get a bracha identical to the brachot for Torah mitzvot. This demonstrates the Torah's authority for Rabbinic Legislation. When we are about to eat matza at the Seder, we say a bracha that acknowledges G-d's command to us to eat matza (on the eve of the 15th of Nissan). Where does the Torah command that? Sh'mot 12:18. And when we are about to light Chanuka Candles and we make a bracha acknowledging G-d's command to us to light candles on each night of Chanuka. Where does the Torah command that? D'varim 17:11. And that's the point. The Torah authorizes Rabbinic Law. Our Sages were careful not to violate the Torah's prohibition against adding to the Torah, while legislating within proper guidelines.

SHABBAT SHALOM & TIZKEH L'MITZVOT - all of them!

JP - R'EI - EREV ROSH CHODESH ELUL

Shabbat Parshat R'ei falls on the 29th of Menachem Av this year. That means that Rosh Chodesh Elul is on Sunday & Monday. This happens 11.51% of the time.

Rosh Chodesh Elul falls on Shabbat Parshat R'ei 28.03% of the time. Not this year. But what makes it interesting is the following:

Usually, on Shabbat Rosh Chodesh, we read the special haftara - HASHAMAYIM KIS-I, Yishayahu 66 (its last perek).

Usually, on Shabbat Erev Rosh Chodesh, we read a different special haftara - VAYOMER LO Y'HONATAN MACHAR CHODESH.

This coming Shabbat is EREV ROSH CHODESH, but we do not read the MACHAR CHODESH haftara, because it would interrupt the flow of the Seven Haftarot of Consolation - read from the Shabbat after Tish'a b'Av through the Shabbat before Rosh HaShana. S'faradim (Eidot Mizrach) will add the first and last p'sukim of the MACHAR CHODESH haftara - after finishing the regular haftara of R'ei. Ashkenazim do not add anything to R'ei's haftara.

FYI - when R'ei is Shabbat Rosh Chodesh, we DO read the haftara for Shabbat Rosh Chodesh, since it too comes from the Consolation p'rakim of Yishayahu. We then read the R'ei haftara that we skip, together with the haftara of Ki Teitzei (right after it), so that none of the Seven haftarot are left out of the schedule. Ki Teitzei's haftara and that of R'ei are continuous in Yishayahu, and the two together happen to be the haftara of Parshat No'ach. This is not for this year; just for your information. The previous paragraph will happen this Shabbat.

Since Menachem Av has 30 days in our fixed calendar, Rosh Chodesh Elul is always two days. Elul itself has only 29 days.

The customs of blowing shofar each weekday morning during Elul (except

for Erev Rosh HaShana) and the recitation of L'DAVID (Ps. 27) begin on Monday morning, the first day of Elul - the second day of Rosh Chodesh. Those who say L'DAVID at Maariv will begin on Sunday night; those who say ot at Mincha will say it two on Monday.

FYI, strict followers of Minhag Yerushalayim (based on the opinions of the Vilna Gaon), do not say L'DAVID.

Eidot Mizrach will begin saying S'lichot from the second of Elul, Tuesday early morning. Ashkenazim will be saying S'lichot this year, from Motza'ei Shabbat Ki Tavo (September 13th). That's a week earlier than the Motza'ei Shabbat right before Rosh HaShana, because we need a minimum of four days of S'lichot before Rosh HaShana. Since R"H is Tuesday & Wednesday this year, Ashkenazi S'lichot begins a week earlier.

We bench R"Ch this Shabbat and announce the coming month - ROSH CHODESH ELUL YIHYEH MACHAR B'YOM RISHON UVYOM SHEINI...

Which finally brings us to R'El. And some interesting stats about the length and ranking of the sedra.

With 126 p'sukim, R'ei is ranked 13th among the Torah's 54 sedras. It is tied in number of p'sukim with Lech L'cha.

But look at the other ways of measuring the length of a sedra. R'ei is written on 257.8 lines in a Sefer Torah (ranks 4th) and Lech L'cha is ranked 23rd, written on only 208 lines. Length in lines is affected by words and letters per pasuk (much higher for R'ei) and amount of blank spaces do to number of Parshiyot (R'ei has many more).

For total words and letters, R'ei is ranked 7th (first in the Book of D'varim). Lech L'cha is ranked 18th and 19th in these two categories.

R'ei has relatively long p'sukim like most sedras in D'varim (hence, increase in rank from p'sukim to words/letters).

Mitzvot, you ask (even if you didn't ask). R'ei has 55 mitzvot of the Torah's 613 mitzvot - only Emor (with 63) and Ki Teitzei (with 74) have more mitzvot.

R'ei has 17 Mitzvot Asei (positive mitzvot) and 38 Mitzvot Lo Taaseh (prohibitions).

Commentaries point out that the Book of D'varim can be divided into three parts. The first part includes the sedras of D'varim, Va'etchanan, and Eikev - which constitutes the first part of Moshe's farewell address to the people, reviewing the formative history since the Exodus until the new generation finds itself at the threshold of Eretz Yisrael. And presenting the foundation of Torah observance, with the Aseret HaDibrot, The Sh'ma (first and second passages), the basic mitzvot of Birkat HaMazon (and all brachot in its wake) and the mitzvot of prayer, Love of G-d, Fear of G-d, and other fundamentals of Judaism - including the primacy of Eretz Yisrael in G-d's plan for His People. The mitzva count is smallish - 2, 12, 8 (22 total).

The middle part of the Book, is the TACHLIS part - Mitzvot and more mitzvot and more mitzvot. Some are reviewed; others are taught by Moshe for the first time. But all are from Sinai. R'ei (55), Sho-f'tim (41), and Ki Teitzei (74) are the sedras of this section of the Book. The GR"A adds the beginning of Ki Tavo with 6 more mitzvot for a total of 176 (a little under 30% of all the mitzvot in the Torah).

And the final section, made up of the bulk of Ki Tavo, all of Nitzavim, Vayeilech, Ha'azinu, and V'zot HaB'racha - have only two mitzvot total, but they contain the concepts of Reward and Punishment, Free Will, Accountability - which combine to give us an understanding of why a Torah life is so important to us.

Among many other topics, we find in R'ei, a second presentation of the animals we may and may not eat. The first time was back in Parshat Sh'mini, where the signs for kosher mammals are given (cud chewer and split hooves) by the kosher animals are not named. Only four non-kosher

mammals are specifically named (both in Sh'mini and R'ei). But in R'ei, we have the kosher animals identified as Cow, Sheep, and Goat - the B'HEIMOT T'HOROT (kosher domesticated farm animals) and seven examples of CHAYOT T'HOROT (kosher 'wild' animals). Namely - gazelle, deer, antelope, ibex, chamois, bison (or wild ox, maybe water buffalo), giraffe. These translations of the Torah's Hebrew words are based on Rav Aryeh Kaplan's The Living Torah. Other opinions exist. Bottom line - split hooves and cud-chewers.

Fishes are not named in either sedra - only the requirement of having fins and scales. Be aware that fishes have different types of scales - Placoid, Cosmoid, Ganoid, and Cycloid & Ctenoid. Only fish with Cycloid or Ctenoid scales are kosher. These scales can easily be scraped off the fish without damaging the fish's skin.

Birds - a list of forbidden types are presented. Unlike mammals and fish, no guidelines, just names. Without definitive simanim (signs), we rely on MASORET - tradition, as to which birds we eat.

We'll leave locust for another time.

One more interesting number related to R'ei. The Torah says, three times, LO T'VASHEIL G'DI BACHALEIV IMO - You may not cook meat with milk. Once in Mishpatim, once in Ki Tisa, once in R'ei. Our Oral Law teaches us that there are three prohibitions concerning Meat-in-Milk: (1) forbidden to cook meat and milk together; (2) forbidden to eat cooked mixtures of milk-in-milk; (3) forbidden to derive any benefit from meat-in-milk that were cooked together. Question - how many mitzvot among the 613 are there for Meat-in-milk? You might say it is one mitzva with three details. Or, you can say that there are three mitzvot - one for each prohibition, learned from three different p'sukim. But the Rambam and Sefer HaChinuch count TWO mitzvot. Counterintuitive. But that's their count. One prohibition for cooking milk and meat together. And one for eating or deriving any benefit (eating being the main benefit). Two mitzvot. So what's the point of the third verse in R'ei? To teach us that - unlike most other forbidden foods, other benefit from the food is also forbidden.

As usual,there is much more to share, but alas, we're out of space.

Shabbat Shalom, Chodesh Tov.

JP - EIKEV

Before we get into the sedra, let's take an overview of the month in which we are in.

The mishna in Taanit declares: When Av enters, we reduce joy. This is how alhatorah.org (highly recommended website) renders the statement in the mishna - Not only does one fast on the Ninth of Av, but from when the month of Av begins, one decreases acts of rejoicing.

But let's do the math. The month has 30 days in our fixed calendar. The minhag is to extend the mournful restrictions of the Nine Days until halachic noon of the 10th of the month. That means that about one-third of the month is mournful and two-thirds are hopeful, comfort-full. The prevalent custom is to call the month MENACHEM AV.

Furthermore, this past Shabbat was TU B'AV, which the mishna declares as the most joyous of festive days for the Jewish People.

The month started mournfully, but has definitely changed to something much more positive.

The name AV, spelled ALEF-BET, is seen by some as an acronym (RASHEI TEIVOT) for ELUL BA, the month of Elul is coming. (This Shabbat is the 22nd of the month; next Shabbat - Parshat R'ei - is the 29th, Erev Rosh Chodesh Elul (Shabbat M'vorchim).

This pointing towards Elul tells us that T'SHUYA (repentance) is necessary, not only as individuals, but for all of Klal Yisrael. If done properly, that puts us further along the road to the GEULA SH'LEIMA (the Complete Redemption) which will see the sadness of the beginning of Av evaporate and morph into a very joyous time.

With 5846 p'sukim in the Torah, divided among 54 sedras, the average length of a sedra is 108.26 p'sukim per sedra. Eikev has 111 p'sukim, which puts it tied with Parshat Vayikra at the 26th position on the list of sedras.

That's close to average, a middle-sized sedra. But when we look at words and letters in a sedra, Eikev jumps to 16th and 14th position, respectively. This is so because Eikev's p'sukim are relatively long. In fact, they are the third longest in the Torah.

Speaking of long... Eikev has an interesting distinction - its Shabbat Mincha, Monday and Thursday layning are the longest of all sedras - 25 p'sukim! With a minimum of 10 p'sukim for a three-aliya reading, 25 is impressively high.

Eikev's first place position for this statistic needs an asterisk, though. When matot and Mas'ei are read separately, the Shabbat Mincha / Monday/Thursday reading officially has only 10 p'sukim. But there is an opinion that the account of the travels in the Midbar should always be read completely, without stopping or cutting it short. Accordingly, some will read the full 49-pasuk section from the beginning of Mas'ei at Shabbat Mincha and on Monday and Thursday mornings, thereby knocking Eikev off the top of the list.

And, as long as we're on this particular topic, a second asterisk can point to one other Shabbat afternoon layning that is longer than Eikev's (but which doesn't apply to Monday and Thursday morning). When Yom Kippur is Shabbat, the Torah reading at mincha is 30 p'sukim long.

Eikev's thrice-read previews, though, are still impressive and noteworthy (at least in a Jewish Press column called Torah by the Numbers).

Eikev has 8 mitzvot of the Torah's 613. Six positive commands and two prohibitions. Doesn't sound like that many - and it isn't, but there are 34 sedras with fewer mitzvot and only 19 sedras with more.

The two prohibitions, both towards the beginning of the sedra, deal with idolatry.

And then - right at the end of the first Aliya, we find a well-known pasuk with the command to "bench" after a satisfying meal - to say Birkat

HaMazon.

Important to note that the Torah's requirement to "Bless HaShem" is after eating a meal and being satisfied with it. Our Sages extended the requirement of Birkat HaMazon to include even a skimpy meal (which includes bread). Furthermore, they (CHAZAL) also require us to say a bracha after eating a significant amount of any food. And further-furthermore (don't look up that word, you won't find it, but it makes the point), they require us to make before-brachot on any amount of food or drink.

Obviously, the full details of brachot before and after food or drink are far too extensive to do more than touch upon them here. But look at this Gemara (Bavli, Brachot 20b):

DARASH RAV AVIRA... (in the name of R' Ami or R' Asi) - The ministering angels said before the Holy One, Blessed be He: Master of the Universe, in Your Torah it is written: "The great, mighty and awesome God who favors no one and takes no bribe" (D'varim 10:17), yet You, nevertheless, show favor to Israel, as it is written: "The Lord shall show favor to you and give you peace" (Bamidbar 6:26). He replied to them: And how can I not show favor to Israel, as I wrote for them in the Torah: "And you shall eat and be satisfied, and bless HaShem your God" (D'varim 8:10)... yet they are exacting with themselves to recite brachot even if they have eaten as much as a KAZAYIT or K'BEITZA. Since they go beyond the requirements of the law, they are worthy of favor.

Let's expand the idea and give it some perspective. Many years ago, I saw a story in Readers Digest - Life in these United States. A mother wrote about her young daughter's enthusiasm. The daughter having learned in Sunday school about saying grace, asked her father who was at the refrigerator taking a can of beer, if he was going to say grace. Funny, heart-warming story from a Christian perspective. At the time, the writer earned \$250 for a couple of paragraphs. Our reaction? We recite a bracha before a sip of water! That's not humorous. That's not blowing things out of proportion. That is part of Hilchot Brachot.

A sip of water might seem a far cry from a full, satisfying meal, but Rabbinic legislation often seeks to give depth to a Torah's mitzva.

And look at what we say for that sip of water - and for many other foods and drinks:

BARUCH ATA HASHEM - (HaShem is the source of all B'RACHA); ELOKEINU MELECH HA-OLAM - (He is) our God and the King of the World, and SHEHAKOL NIHYAH BIDVARO - that everything that exists by His say so. A nine-word bracha that many people take for granted and mumble through in a second or two. It deserves more than that. It is an amazing statement of Jewish belief and hashkafa.

So too, Eikev gives us the source of the mitzva to daven. Once again, Rabbinic law has given us the how many times a day, at what times, and what to say. It should, however, never escape us that the Torah's command to Serve God with all our Heart is the core of our davening. Don't let the formal prayers of the Siddur take prayer out of our hearts and just be a product of mind and mouth. We are challenged to daven with proper KAVANA and enthusiasm and with a feeling of humility before God and love for Him.

Brachot come in different categories. Six brachot before food; Birkat HaMazon, B'RACHA MEI'EIN SHALOSH (AL HAMICHYA, AL HAGEFEN, AL HAEITZ), Borei N'fashot, after food. Five brachot for smell. A number of brachot for hearing and seeing. Many, many brachot before doing mitzvot (and interesting reasons for doing some mitzvot without preceding them with a bracha). Many brachot within davening, blending, in essence, the mitzva of Birkat HaMazon and the mitzva of Prayer.

Little kids in religious homes learn brachot before they can otherwise put a sentence together. But careful and meaningful brachot is an ongoing, developing challenge. Let's take the challenge seriously and properly appreciate and thank HKBH for everything He gives us... all with Love.

Shabbat Shalom

Parshat Va'etchanan - Shabbat Nachamu - TU b'AV

Let's start with Nachamu. A Shabbat named for its haftara. Here's a riddle to ask your Shabbat guests:

What Shabbatot are named for their haftara?

Nachamu is one. Last week's Chazon is another. Shabbat Shuva. Shabbat HaGadol. That's four.

What about being named for the Maftir? Sh'kalim, Zachor, Para, HaChodesh. Another four.

What Shabbatot are named from the regular Torah reading? Shabbat B'reishit. Shabbat Shira. I think that's it.

Arm yourselves with the answers and make your guests squirm. But not too much. Give hints to help them.

Parshat Va'etchanan is always the Shabbat immediately following Tish'a b'Av. Interestingly, this year (and most years) we read part of Va'etchanan last Shabbat at Mincha (as usual) and on Monday and Thursday mornings (again, as usual). On Shabbat, we read the whole sedra, of course. But we also read part of Va'etchanan this past Sunday, on Tish'a b'Av morning.

Va'etchanan has 122 p'sukim, putting it towards the bottom of the top third of the 54 sedras, pasuk-wise. It's rank rises to 10th place for words and letters, because its p'sukim are larger than average. And because of more than average blank spaces in a Sefer Torah, due to many parshiyot (which are separated from each other with blank space), it rises to number 7 (of the 54) line-wise. It takes up 249 lines in a Sefer Torah.

As far as Sedra Stats go, it gets more interesting which the count of mitzvot. Officially, there are 12 mitzvot (of the 613 mitzvot of the Torah) in Parshat Va'etchanan.

That might not seem like that many, but only 17 sedras have a double-digit mitzva count.

Add to this, that Va'etchanan is a good example of a sedra (there are a number of them) which contains significantly more mitzvot than the official number indicates.

For example, the second presentation of the Aseret HaDibrot is in Va'etchanan. I hope you, dear reader, realize that calling the Aseret HaDibrot, the Ten Commandments is a misleading term. The Torah itself refers to the Ten as the Aseret HaD'varim. The Ten Sayings or Utterances is more accurate. Even the fancy term of Greek origin works well - the Decalogue. Deca means 10 and logos means word or saying. The Ten Words or the Ten Sayings (or the Ten Statements) all work better than the Ten Commandments. (No offense to Charlton Heston, Yul Brenner, or Edward G. Robinson.)

The Aseret HaDibrot consists of 13 p'sukim (both in Yitro and in Va'etchanan) and contains 14 mitzvot in the Yitro text and 15 mitzvot in the Va'etchanan text. The 14 mitzvot are counted from Yitro, but they are just as much in Va'etchanan, but not counted again.

The 15th mitzva of the Big Ten (as we sometimes call it) is V'LO TIT-AVEH, not to lust after that which your fellow has. Those words do not appear in the Yitro text. So 14 mitzvot are counted from Yitro and are repeated in Va'etchanan, and V'LO TIT-AVEH is counted from Va'etchanan.

With just adding the 14 mitzvot from the Decalogue, we're up to 26 mitzvot, and there are more.

On a different note: I recently saw a statistic - which I had seen in the past - that 22% of all Nobel Laureates were Jewish, even though Jews make up only a fifth of a percent of the World's population. This brought to mind the p'sukim in this week's sedra (D'varim 4:5-6) -

Behold, I have taught you statutes and ordinances, as HaShem, my God,

commanded me, to do so in the midst of the land to which you are coming to possess. And you shall keep [them] and do [them], for that is your wisdom and your understanding in the eyes of the peoples...

On a different note, Moshe Rabeinu seems to be anxious and insistent about warning the people about Avoda Zara (idolatry). Specifically, he says to the people (and all of us, as well) that during Revelation at Sinai, we had heard G-d's voice but had not seen any image of him. (I would add that as human beings, we have a difficult time dealing with the Invisible, Intangible characteristics of HaShem.) So be very careful not to worship images of any sort. (It seems that it is a temptation to do so, not necessarily to replace God but even to give oneself a physical focus for worship.)

Then he adds (4:19) - And lest you lift up your eyes to heaven, and see the sun, and the moon, and the stars, all the host of heaven, which HaShem your God assigned to all peoples under the entire heaven, and be drawn away to prostrate yourselves before them and worship them.

Rambam, in the first chapter of his Hilchot Avoda Zara, says that the beginning of the turn away from proper belief in God began in the third generation of the World, with the idea that the Sun was a high-ranking minister of God, so powerful in the sky, giving light and warmth, and life - and it followed that a way of honoring God would be to venerate His Prime Minister.

With the warning against venerating the heavenly bodies, perhaps one would think that looking at the sky and studying the heavenly bodies might not be a good idea.

Comes the Navi Yishayahu in this week's haftara and says (40:26) -

Lift up your eyes on high and see, who created these, who takes out their host by number; all of them He calls by name; because of His great might and because He is strong in power, no one is missing.

Pondering the heavenly bodies, studying them and nature in general - can be a way of getting to know the Creator better and appreciate all that He did and does for us.

The last mishna in Taanit tells us that there were no more joyous holidays in Judaism than TU b'AV and Yom Kippur.

Without going into all the reasons that have been attached to TU b'Av, let me choose one of numerical interest. According to our Tradition, not only was the decree that the adult male population of the generation of the Midbar should wander for 40 years and die out without entering the Holy Land (except for Yehoshua and Kalev), but they actually died on Tish'a b'Av - about 15,000 each year. In the final year of wandering, the remaining 15,000 were prepared to die on Tish'a b'Av. They dug graves and slept in them, not expecting to wake up in the morning. When they did wake up, they assumed that they erred in counting the days of the month. It was when the moon of that month (Av) was full, that they realized that God had commuted their sentences (so to speak) and that day - the 15th of Av became a day of celebration and thanks for the 15 thousand who were spared.

See the CALnotes link on philotorah.co for more on TU b'AV.

Have an extra special Shabbat Shalom as well begin the period of Nechama (comfort) following the days of mourning for Jerusalem.

JP - D'VARIM - CHAZON - EREV TISH'A B'AV

There is a calendar match up between the seven days of Pesach and most of the rest of the calendar, using AT-BASH (ALEF-TAV, BET-SHIN, GIMEL-REISH... KAF-LAMED. As follows...

ALEF-TAV: The first day of Pesach falls on the same day of the week as Tish'a b'Av (and Shiv'a Asar b'Tamuz).

BET-SHIN: The second day of Pesach falls on the same day of the week as Shavuot. (So too, Yom Yerushalayim.)

GIMEL-REISH: The third day of Pesach falls on the same day of the week as Rosh HaShana (Sukkot & Sh'mini Atzeret also).

DALET-KUF: The 4th day of Pesach falls on the same day as Kinyan HaTorah (i.e. Simchat Torah, in Chutz LaAretz).

HEI-TZADI: The fifth day of Pesach falls on the same day of the week as TZOM (i.e. Yom Kippur. Same for Tzom Gedaliya, except it gets pushed off to Sunday when 3 Tishrei falls on Shabbat).

VAV-PEI: The sixth day of Pesach falls on the same day of the week as did Purim a month earlier. (Using the word PLAG, adds to the list that Purim and Lag BaOmer fall on the same day of the week.)

ZAYIN-AYIN: The seventh day of Pesach falls on the same day of the week as Atzma'ut (referring to 5 Iyar - Yom Haatzma'ut often gets postponed or preponed).

Chanuka is the only holiday that doesn't fit in because of the fact that there is a 30 Marcheshvan in some years and not in others. Asar b'Tevet also doesn't fit because of the Marcheshvan & Kislev number of days.

With all of that said, let's focus on Tish'a b'Av.

Pesach's first day is LO B'DU, not on a Monday (BET), Wednesday

(DALET), Friday (VAV). So too for Tish'a b'Av, with the additional fact that even though 9 Av can fall on Shabbat, when that happens, the fast is postponed to Motza'ei Shabbat - Sunday.

It follows that Tish'a b'Av is observed on Sunday, Tuesday, or Thursday.

Frequency for Sunday combines 11.51% for 9 Av on Sunday with 28.03% when 9 Av is Shabbat and the fast is on Sunday. Total frequency of fast on Sunday is 39.54% (almost 40% - the most common occurrence).

Tuesday weighs in at 31.89% and Thursday at 28.57%.

There is a link on philotorah.co for a review of Shabbat Chazon and Tish'a b'Av.

Parshat D'varim is always the Shabbat before Tish'a b'Av - with Matot and Mas'ei being combined (most often) and read separately (a rarer occurrence) to see to it that D'varim is Shabbat Chazon.

This is most appropriate because D'varim contains Moshe Rabeinu's telling the new generation poised on the threshold of Eretz Yisrael about the Sin of the Spies - that which caused a 40-year delay on entry to the Land. The Mishna in Taanit lists five calamities that occurred on the 9th of Av - first on the list is the Sin of the Spies. The other four events on the list are all associated with the Churban - destruction of the Beit HaMikdash. But the sad, mournful nature of Tish'a b'Av began on the 9th of Av in the year 2448 to Creation, when the people cried for no good reason and HaShem said that we would have good reason to cry on that date in the future.

Parshat D'varim is average size for a sedra, with 105 p'sukim (average for the Torah is a bit more than 108 p'sukim. Average for the Book of D'varim is only 87 p'sukim per sedra. Sefer D'varim has 11 sedras - 5 longer than D'varim and 5 shorter.

Parshat D'varim has two of the 613 mitzvot of the Torah - both related to

judges, but with lessons for all of us. There are formal judges and the rest of us every so often, are in the position to judge - parent, teacher, employer, family, friend.

Let's take a look at the Book of D'varim, within the whole Chumash.

Here are the numbers of sedras, p'sukim, average number of p'sukim per sedra, and the number of mitzvot, avg. per sedra - in each Book of the Torah:

B'reishit: 12 sedras, 1533 p'sukim, 128 p'sukim per sedra (pps), 3 mitzvot, 0.25 mitzvot per sedra (mps).

Sh'mot: 11, 1210, 110 pps, 111 mitzvot, 10.1 mps.

Vayikra: 10, 859, 86 pps, 247 mitzvot, 24.7 mps.

Bamidbar: 10, 1288, 129 pps, 52 mitzvot, 5.2 mps.

D'varim: 11, 956, 87 pps, 200 mitzvot, 18.2 mps.

Whole Torah: 54 sedras, 5846 p'sukim, 108.26 pps, 613 mitzvot, 11.35 mps.

Vayikra and D'varim's sedras are the shortest; B'reishit and Bamidbar's are the longest; Sh'mot is near average.

Vayikra and D'varim are the big mitzva-Books, with Vayikra having no sedra without mitzvot.

The whole Book of D'varim takes place in one location - Arvot Moav, and in the 37 days from the first of Sh'vat in the 40th year of wandering through the 7th of Adar when Moshe Rabeinu was taken from us.

The Vilna Gaon points to the opening p'sukim of the sedra and the Book which spends five p'sukim between "These are the things that Moshe spoke... until LEIMOR (saying). The words DIBEIR (spoke) twice and the

word BEI-EIR (explained) points to three distinct sections in Sefer D'varim.

The first section comprises the sedras of D'varim, Va'etchanan, and Eikev. In these three sedras, Moshe reviews the history of the previous 40 years and lays the foundation stones of Judaism - the Aseret HaDibrot (10 Commandments), the first two passages of Sh'ma, the mitzvot of Birkat HaMazon (which includes on a Rabbinic level, all b'rachot), the mitzva to daven.

Then comes the sedras of R'ei, Sho-f'tim, and Ki Teitzei (and the first part of Ki Tavo) which contain 176 mitzvot - almost 29% of the Torah's mitzvot in 6% of the Torah's text.

The third section is the rest of Ki Tavo, Nitzavim, Vayeilech, Ha'azinu, and V'zot HaB'racha. In these sedras we find accountability, Reward & Punishment, Free Will, the mitzva of T'shuva - all serving to give rhyme and reason to the way of life that HaShem wants for us, His People - a life of Torah, Mitzvot, Chesed.

The Book of D'varim is Moshe Rabeinu's farewell address to Bnei Yisrael - and what a farewell address it was!

May we properly mourn Yerushalayim and be privileged to see and rejoice in its rebuilding, BIMHEIRA V'YAMEINU - AMEIN.

JP - MATOT-MAS'EI (M&M) - ROSH CHODESH AV (R"CH)

R"Ch Av falls on Shabbat 11.51% of years. The Torah reading on Shabbat R"Ch Av is Matot-Mas'ei (like this year, 7.64% of the time) and Mas'ei on its own (3.87% of the time).

Matot-Mas'ei-R"Ch is a 2-Torah Shabbat, the reading of which consists of 244 p'sukim for the double sedra (112 for Matot and 132 for Mas'ei) and another 7 p'sukim for the Maftir for Shabbat Rosh Chodesh - making it the longest Torah reading of any Shabbat with 251 p'sukim.

There are seven pairs of sedras that are combined in some years and separated in other years. The frequencies of combined and separate vary among the seven pairs, with Matot-Mas'ei being, by far, the most often combined sedras. They are combined 89.5% of years in Chutz LaAretz, and 79.5% of years in Eretz Yisrael. When Pesach is Shabbat to Friday in Israel, we resume Parshat HaShavua on the 8th day of Pesach in Chu"l. When this happens in a Shana M'uberet (13-month, two-Adar year), Israel and Chu"l go out of sync for Parshat HaShavua for 15 Shabbatot. M&M are combined in Chu"l, and we split it so that we are back in sync for Shabbat Parshat D'varim - Shabbat Chazon.

This year, M&M are combined all over the world.

I found an interesting numeric hint for M&M being the most-often combined double sedra. The gimatriya of the whole first pasuk of Matot - Moshe spoke to the heads of the tribes of the children of Israel, saying: This is the thing HaShem has commanded. - is 3324. And the whole first pasuk of Mas'ei - These are the journeys of the children of Israel who left the land of Egypt in their legions, under the charge of Moshe and Aharon. - is also 3324. This links them in a numeric way. No other sedra's opening pasuk matches any other's.

An observation: Of the 54 sedras, there are five whose names have had the HEI at the beginning of word truncated. This week's MATOT occurs in the beginning of the sedra as HAMATOT. As you are reading this, try to

come up with the other four before you get to the next sentence. And make a riddle for your Shabbat table challenging the people to find the five (letter HEI, gimatriya 5) sedra names missing the HEI HAY'DI'A (the HEI that means THE).

The five sedras are (HA)MISHPATIM, (HA)SH'MINI, (HA)M'TZORA, (HA)MATOT, (HA)D'VARIM. Fun Torah-trivia to share with your children, grandchildren, guests.

Speaking of numbers - which this column does - aside for the censuses of Parshat Bamidbar and Parshat Pinchas, which would justify calling the Book of Bamidbar, NUMBERS, we find a different kind of counting in Parshat Matot. After the success victory over Midyan by the army of 12,000 men, 1000 from each tribe, we find the command to count the number of human captives and the numbers of the different animals that were taken as spoils of war.

And there are a lot of numbers. They start with Bamidbar 31:26 - Take a count of the plunder of the captive people and animals, you, together with Elazar HaKohen and the paternal leaders of the community... Divide it equally between the warriors and the rest of the People... Tax on the soldiers of $1/500$ (0.2%) and from the people, a tax of $1/50$ (2%).

And then the numbers overflow... 675,000 sheep, 72,000 cattle, 61,000 donkeys, captive women 32,000... and then, the puzzling further numbers - half for the soldiers: 337,500; tax: 675; 36,000; tax: 72; 30,500; tax: 61; 16,000 captive women, tax: 32. More, the other half: 337,550; 36,000; 30,500; 16,000.

Loads of numbers - and why can't we do the math on our own? We know how to divide by 2. We know how to divide by 500. Ramban offers an answer - to highlight a miracle that occurred, that all during the period of counting and dividing everything up, and giving the tax amounts to the Kohanim (the $1/500$ from the soldiers) and Leviyim (the $1/50$ from the rest of the nation), not one person of the multitude of Bnei Yisrael, had died.

Which brings us to Parshat Mas'ei. The first notable number is 42. That's

the number of places encampments, from leaving Egypt until being poised at the threshold of Eretz Yisrael. If you count the places, you will need to include the place Israel left Egypt from, among the 42 places. And, of course the last place being Arvot Moav, the Plains of Moav, on the east side of the Jordan River opposite Yericho (Jericho). And if you number the places from zero to 41, rather than from 1-42, then the 25th place of encampment is Chashmona, and because of the play-on-words to the Chashmona'im, makes this one of several REMEZ, hints to Chanuka from the Torah. CHANU KAF-HEI, they rested at place #25.

Another significant number connected to Parshat Mas'ei, specifically to Bamidbar 33:53, the pasuk that the Ramban (Nachmanides) cites as the source of his Mitzva #4 - the mitzva to live in Israel, Mitzvat Yishuv Eretz Yisrael. Famously, the Rambam does not number living in Israel among his list of the 613 (Taryag) mitzvot. Although that fact is often used as an excuse given by some religious Jews for not seriously considering making Aliya. If it were really a mitzva the Rambam too would have included it. Without going into the reasons for its not being on the Rambam's list of mitzvot (beyond the scope of this column), suffice it to say that the Rambam, in his monumental halachic work - Mishneh Torah, echoes the Gemara in saying that a person shall always live in Israel, even in a city the majority of whose inhabitants are idol worshipers, rather than live in Chutz LaAretz, even in a place the majority of whose inhabitants are Jewish.

Yet another significant number from Mas'ei is 2000, the number of AMOT (cubits) outside a city designated for Leviyim (there being 48 such cities throughout Eretz Yisrael - the six Cities of Refuge [AREI MIKLAT] plus 42 other cities contributed to the Leviyim from the other tribes), as being included in the city's boundaries. Our Sages decreed that the T'CHUM SHABBAT, the maximum distance one may walk outside his place of residence (be it a stand alone home with no nearby neighbors, a small village, a town, or even a large city) on Shabbat - 2000 amot (about a kilometer or about .62 miles - varying with the different opinions as to the length of an AMA).

A final word on Rosh Chodesh Av and the Nine Days that it starts. The

mishna in Taanit states: MISHENICHNAS AV... when Av enters, we diminish our joy. (If that statement brings to mind that opposite sentiment for Adar - MISHENICHNAS ADAR MARBIN B'SIMCHA, just know that the Av statement came first - it's in the Mishna, and the Adar statement is found later in the Gemara.

Important to keep things in perspective - Menachem Av has 30 days in our fixed calendar. The first nine and a half (or sometimes the first ten) are days of mourning the Churban. Two thirds of the month focus on NECHAMA, comfort in the promises and prophecies of the GEULA, and serve as an introduction to the month of Elul (AV is an acronym for ELUL BA) and the YAMIM NORA'IM that follow.

Shabbat Shalom, Chodesh Tov, and may we soon be privileged to celebrate the Yom Tov of Tish'a b'Av, BIMHEIRA V'YAMEINU.

JP - PARSHAT PINCHAS - SHABBAT M'VORCHIM

Parshat Pinchas is the second longest sedra in the Torah and second longest in the Book of Bamidbar - Parshat Naso is the longest.

Well, that depends how you compare sedras. Pinchas is written on 280 lines in a Sefer Torah and has 168 p'sukim, earning its second place ranking. But with 1887 words, it drops to 9th place! A significant drop which is due to the fact that Pinchas's p'sukim are relatively short - specifically, with an average of 11.2 words per pasuk, there are only 5 sedras with shorter p'sukim. (Torah's average is 13.7, with 79,976 words in the Torah's 5846 p'sukim.)

Yet, Pinchas's 7853 letters raises it to 4th largest sedra, letterer-wise, because its words average to be the longest in the Torah. How many letters per word?

Go figure. (Actually, that's exactly what I did.)

MITZVOT. Parshat Pinchas contains 6 of the 613 mitzvot, all positive. One of only six sedras that have only positive mitzvot.

If Parshat Bamidbar showed why the Book of Bamidbar is called the Book of Numbers, then Parshat Pinchas confirms that name. This sedra contains the census of the people of the new generation, the people who will be entering Eretz Yisrael. Let's compare the numbers from the census taken of the men from the age of 20 who came out of Egypt, with this new census. (Actually, the official purpose of this count was for the battle against Midyan.) Remember, the only two individuals who are counted both times are Yehoshua and Kalev.

(And according to a tradition we have that approx. 15,000 men of Dor HaMidbar did NOT die in the final year of wandering, the number of overlaps jumps dramatically. But we'll stick to the P'SHAT, the straightforward reading of the verses.)

Let's look at the two countings, side by side:

<u>Shevet</u>	<u>first</u>	<u>second</u>	<u>change</u>	<u>% change</u>
Reuven	46,500	43,730	-2770	-6.0
Shimon	59,300	22,200	-37,100	-62.6
Yehuda	74,600	76,500	1,900	2.5
Yissachar	54,400	64,300	9900	18.2
Zevulun	57,400	60,500	3100	5.4
Dan	62,700	64,400	1700	2.7
Naftali	53,400	45,400	-8000	-15.0

Gad	45,650	40,500	-5150	-11.3
Asher	41,500	53,400	11,900	28.7
Efrayim	40,500	32,500	-8000	-19.8
Menashe	32,200	52,700	20,500	63.7
<u>Binyamin</u>	<u>35,400</u>	<u>45,600</u>	<u>10200</u>	<u>28.8</u>
total	603,550	601,730	-1,820	-0.3

Let me point out a number of things:

In forty years (actually, 39 years between the censuses), the adult male population declined slightly. We can intuit that the overall population grew significantly.

The tribe of Menashe increased most significantly (+63%). Asher and Binyamin, and Yissachar too, increased significantly. Menashe's increase allowed them to have good numbers on both sides of the Jordan River - the only tribe to dwell on both sides of the river.

Efrayim's decrease was significant, probably due to their defeat in a battle the Torah itself does not recount, but other sources do.

Most striking is Shimon's drop (-62.6%), largely due to the fact that most of those who were struck down by the plague recounted at the end of last week's sedra, were from Shevet Shimon.

WHAT'S IN A NAME?

Fifty-four sedras, how many are named for people? No'ach, Yitro, Korach, Balak, Pinchas - and let's add Chayei Sara to the list. Focus on the name of this week's sedra.

PINCHAS. This week's sedra's name. My name, too (although I spell it without the YUD and I'm not a Kohen). And my father-in-law's (with the YUD and he was a Kohen). Most English speakers pronounce it PIN-chas.

Incorrect pronunciation (let's call it, inaccurate) in two ways.

The first syllable is PI, not PIN, because the CHIRIK under the PEI followed by YUD is a major vowel and usually stands on its own. The SH'VA under the NUN that follows is a SH'VA NA, which begins the second syllable, N'CHAS. Furthermore, the accent is on the second (last) syllable, not the first one.

pi-N'CHAS, not PIN-chas

English speakers and others do the accent-shift on many names. Take this as informational, not a push to change the way we say the names.

We say AV-raham, YITZ-chak, YA-akov. In my opinion, that's okay when you are using the name in regular conversation. But in davening and Torah reading, care should be taken to accent the names (and all words) correctly. Our AVOT are avra-HAM, yitz-CHAK, and ya-AKOV. Same thing for yo-SEIF, mo-SHE, and so on. Not all names work this way. Some are actually pronounced MIL'EIL, on the next-to-the-last syllable. NO-ach, for example.

Speaking of NO'ACH - A riddle: Where do we find him in Parshat Pinchas? Actually, there are two answers.

In the TEIVA. Play on words, Teiva is the ARK, but it also means WORD. You can find No'ach (NUN-CHET) in the word, PINCHAS.

The second answer is a groaner. In Parshat Pinchas, we are introduced to the five daughters of Tz'lofchad - Machla, No'a, Chogla, Milka, and Tirtza. Their father had no sons, only daughters. Which means that they had NO ACH. Told you it was a groaner. But try the riddle at your Shabbat table. See how it goes.

A good number of p'sukim towards the end of the sedra, detail the communal korbanot (sacrifices, offerings) that were brought in the Mishkan and later, the Beit HaMikdash - daily (the two T'midim), and the additional offerings - MUSAF - on Rosh Chodesh and Holy days.

Of interest number-wise, is the fact that on Rosh Chodesh, Pesach, Shavuot, Rosh HaShana, and Yom Kippur, and Sh'mini Atzeret, the Musaf included seven lambs. But on each day of Sukkot, there were fourteen lambs brought.

The answer touches upon the dual nature of Sukkot. Most of us think of Sukkot as the third and final holiday of the SHALOSH REGALIM, the three pilgrimage Festivals. And that is so. But it is also the third and final holiday of the Tishrei holidays. We are used to thinking of Rosh HaShana being the day G-d writes His Judgment of each of us and on Yom Kippur he seals the Judgment. We see this many times in our davening. But the finalization of the Judgment takes place on Hoshana Rabba, the final day of Sukkot. The special davening - texts and tunes - on that day show that Sukkot is part of the three Tishrei holy days. Hence (perhaps) the doubling of the number of lambs.

The other noteworthy numbers of Sukkot's korbanot are how many bulls (PARIM) were offered each day - From 13 on the first day, 12 on the second,

down to 7 on the seventh day of the Chag. PAREI HACHAG add up to the special number 70, here alluding to the traditional number of nations in the world. (Yes, there are more than 70, but the number is iconic.)

A brief word or two about Rosh Chodesh Benching.

First of all, Rosh Chodesh Av is always one day in our fixed calendar, because Tammuz has 29 days.

Rosh Chodesh Av will be (next) Shabbat Kodesh. And we announce the month as MENACHEM AV, even though the first 10 days of the month are usually referred to as AV, with the MENACHEM AV becoming the month's name from afternoon of the 10th through the 30th of the month.

Because the Mishna tells us - As Av enters, we diminish in joy, there were suggestions that we should not announce the Rosh Chodesh of Av in advance. It comes when it comes, but why joyously announce it. But we do bench Rosh Chodesh Av, because M'vorchim is more than an announcement - it invokes blessings from G-d for the coming month. It is hard to find a month that need's HaShem's blessing more than Av.

Shabbat Shalom and Chodesh Tov

JP - PARSHAT BALAK; SHIV'A ASAR B'TAMMUZ

Let's start by looking at the numbers and days of the week for Shiv'a Asar b'Tammuz.

The 17th of Tammuz (and the 9th of Av) always fall on the same day of the week as the first day of Pesach. The 'rule' for Pesach is LO B'DU, it will not begin on a Monday, Wednesday, or Friday. And neither will 17 Tammuz or 9 Av. Additionally, although the 17th of Tammuz and the 9th of Av can fall on Shabbat, when that happens, the fasts are bumped to Sunday.

That leaves us with three possible days of the week for these two fast days. Here they are, with their (frequencies).

Sunday (39.54%); Tuesday (31.89%); Thursday (28.57%).

Sunday's frequency is higher because of the times the fast is bumped to Sunday (NIDCHEH).

This year, 5785, is the rarest of all 14 year-types in our Calendar, occurring only 3.31% of years. The last two years exactly like this year were 5663 (1903) and 5754 (1994). The next scheduled one is 5805 (2045). Rare indeed!

The 17th of Tammuz (date and fast) fall on the day after Shabbat Parshat Balak, this year and two other year-types, for a total frequency of 11.51%, still rare.

Then we have year-type in which the 17th is Shabbat and the fast is NIDCHEH to Sunday. This happens in three year-types, including the most common one, which occurs 18.05% of the time. Total frequency of Shabbat being the 17th is 28.03%. Add that to the 11.51% and you get the fast being on Sunday 39.54% of the time (almost 40%).

It gets a bit more complicated when we look at what sedra is read on the day right before the Fast of 17 Tammuz.

Let's only look at the Shabbat before the Fast regardless of which day of the week the fast is.

The competition is between Balak and Pinchas.

Balak precedes the Fast of the Fourth Month (that's what the Navi calls Shiv'a Asar b'Tammuz) almost 80% of the time. That includes, in Chutz LaAretz the years when Shavuot is Friday-Shabbat and the sedra right before the fast is Chukat-Balak. That doesn't happen in Israel, since Shavuot in those years is only on Friday. So we'll keep it at 80% for Balak. And it is even higher than that outside of Israel, because during another two year-types, Pesach is Shabbat to Friday in Israel and Shabbat to Shabbat elsewhere. In 13-month, two-Adar years, the Shabbat in question (the one before the Fast, is Balak in Chu"l and Pinchas in Israel.

Bottom line: Balak precedes the Fast of the Fourth (TZOM R'VI"l) 80% of the time in Israel and 90% of the time in Chutz LaAretz.

Since this column is supposed to focus on numbers, I could end the part about 17 Tammuz and move on to Parshat Balak. But I'll throw in a couple more numbers as an excuse to make an insightful point about 17 Tammuz.

The mishna in Taanit (4:6, these are numbers) lists 5 things that occurred on the 17th of Tammuz. The first calamity on the list is that Moshe smashed the Luchot (when he saw the golden calf).

The Navi Zechariya (8:19) prophesies in HaShem's name that the four mournful fasts associated with the destructions of the Batei Mikdash will become MO'ADIM TOVIM, festive days.

Rabbi Ephraim Sprecher z"l asked the following: I understand why the fast days will no longer be days of mourning with the Third Beit HaMikdash, but why would they be happy days?

His answer: Imagine what would have been on the 17th of Tammuz had Cheit Eigel not happened. The people waited in excited anticipation for Moshe's return from his 40 day and 40 night experience with HaShem on Har Sinai. Moshe would come back to the people with the Tablets of Stone, the Aseret HaDibrot, and all of the Torah and Mitzvot - that which would be Written and those teachings that would partner with the Written Word as the Oral Law and Tradition. Imagine the joy! A second Z'MAN MATAN TORATEINU.

But, alas it didn't happen that way. We could say that Shiv'a Asar

b'Tammuz was cheated. The people stole its joy.

That joy will be restored in the time of the Third Beit HaMikdash, may it speedily come to be - AMEIN!

Balak's numbers are startling in their simplicity. The sedra is made up of two parshiyot. One huge portion of 95 p'sukim (probably the third longest of the Torah's 674 parshiyot. With 5846 p'sukim in the Torah, there are an average of 8.7 p'sukim per parsha. And the first of Balak's two is 95 p'sukim long!

Aside from its remarkable length, the parsha in question has another - more significant distinction. It is the only portion of the Torah's narrative, from Sh'mot until the Torah's final words - L'EINEI KOL YISRAEL, that was not witnessed by the people of Israel.

The whole Balak-Bil'am story took place without our knowing anything about it. The only way we know about it is because HaShem included it in the Torah. Exile and slavery in Egypt - witnessed by a multitude. Splitting of the Sea - same. Sinai experience - same. Every event recorded in the Torah was witnessed by the People. Except this.

It is as if HaShem said to us - after the fact - I'll take care of this one on my own. You just go about your daily routine.

But with 104 p'sukim in the average length sedra (but short for the Book of Bamidbar), the 95-pasuk story of Balak & Bil'am does not cover the whole sedra. And the second parsha, the last 9 p'sukim, do not reflect well on us (to greatly understate matters).

Following Bil'am's repeated failure to do what Balak hired him for - "Bless" the Children of Israel, he and Balak hatched a plan to get HaShem angry with His own People. What Bil'am and Balak and many others throughout our history could not accomplish, we did to ourselves. Bil'am and Balak conspired to have the women seduce the Israelite men to the orgiastic worship of Baal Peor. The plague that HaShem sent in punishment had claimed 24,000 lives, and would have continued were it not for the zealous action of Pinchas. But that's another story.

Parshat Balak has none of the Torah's 613 mitzvot. Sixteen other sedras of

the Torah's 54, have no mitzvot counted from them.

Notice that we have had a run of four sedras with 3-letter names. Sh'lach, Korach, Chukat, and Balak. Note too, that there is the letter KUF that was the first in the name KORACH, second in the name CHUKAT, and third in the name BALAK. Significance? I doubt it. But still interesting.

Try asking your Shabbat table family and guests about the three-letter sedra names. Don't just read them the list; see if they can figure it out for themselves.

The other three-letter sedra-names are MIKEITZ, EMOR, B'HAR (that's 2 in a row), then the 4 in a row in the Book of Bamidbar. EIKEV, R'EI (also two in a row). And that's the list. One in B'reishit. None in Sh'mot. A pair in Vayikra. Four in Bamidbar and a pair in D'varim. Nine 3-letter sedra-names.

Shabbat Shalom and have a meaningful fast.

JP - CHUKAT

Before we get into Parshat Chukat and its numbers, let me share with you some Torah-stats.

There are 54 sedras in the Torah; B'reishit 12, Sh'mot 11, Vayikra 10, Bamidbar 10, D'varim 11.

Let's take one more stat - p'sukim. There are 5846 p'sukim in the Torah. The breakdown by Book is: B'reishit 1533; Sh'mot 1210; Vayikra 859; Bamidbar 1288; D'varim 956.

But look at the average number of p'sukim per sedra: B'reishit 127.75; Sh'mot 110; Vayikra 85.9; Bamidbar 128.8; D'varim 86.9.

Largest sedras by average number of p'sukim per sedra are in the Books of Bamidbar & B'reishit; the shortest sedras are in the Books of Vayikra & D'varim; Sh'mot's sedras are somewhere in the middle - a bit above average, which is $5846/54$, which is 108.26.

Now look at Chukat

Written on 159.2 lines; rank: 39; 87 p'sukim; rank: 43rd; 1245 words; rank: 40th; 4670 letters; rank 41st.

Chukat is the smallest sedra in Bamidbar in lines, p'sukim, words, and letters. Sticking with p'sukim, there are 11 sedras that are shorter; 42 that are longer.

Chukat has only 3 mitzvot of the 613; all positive.

Again, to show the very uneven distribution of mitzvot in the Torah:

Chukat has 3 (so do two other sedras). 26 sedras have more than Chukat; 25 sedras have fewer mitzvot. 3 is way below average (which is 11.4 mitzvot per sedra), but it is the median number of mitzvot in a sedra. About a third of the sedras (17) have no mitzvot; about a third have more than 85% of Taryag; a little more than a third have less than 15% of the Torah's mitzvot. That also means that more than two thirds of the sedras have less than 15% of the mitzvot.

Unlike the two previous sedras of Sh'lach and Korach, each of which were two-thirds story and a third juxtapositional mitzvot, Chukat's three mitzvot are part of the same mitzva-topic - namely, Para Aduma, with the bulk of the sedra being a string of episodes in the Midbar-wandering period.

Chukat's three mitzvot are:

(1) All the details of the preparation of the Para Aduma Potion that was used to purify someone who became TAMEI from contact with a dead body. In other words, the mitzva is - Do everything necessary, from taking the red heifer to preparing the final product.

(2) The second mitzva is that a person becomes TAMEI (ritually defiled) from contact with (or being under the same roof as a) dead body. It seems that this mitzva includes performing the purification process on one who is T'mei Meit (defiled to a dead body).

(3) The dual nature of the Para Aduma potion (that it purifies the defiled and defiles the ritually pure) is counted as a mitzva of its own.

Now let's take a look at one particular pasuk - Bamidbar 19:12.

I'm focusing on this pasuk because some translators have erred in their translation, which misrepresents the halacha.

Literal translation is awkward. It is something like this:

He (the one who is TAMEI) shall be purified by it (the Para Aduma Potion) on the third day (comma here?) and on the seventh day (or comma here?) he will become TAHOR (pure)...

Here is a WRONG translation - He shall purify himself with it on the third day, and on the seventh day he shall be clean...

The mistake this translator made was pausing after "on the third day", putting a comma there. This seems to say that the TAMEI individual needs the application of the Para Aduma Potion on the third day (of his counting from when he became TAMEI) and then he becomes TAHOR on the seventh day.

In fact, application of the potion needs to be on the third and seventh days, and at nightfall following the seventh day, the person is TAHOR. (He also needs to immerse in a mikve on the seventh day.)

Here is a correct translation: On the third and seventh days, he shall cleanse himself with it, so that he can become clean...

Or this way: [In order to become] clean, he must have himself sprinkled [with the purification water] on the third day and the seventh day. This is more than a translation; it explains the pasuk (and the halacha).

Translation aside, the way a BAAL K'RI'A reads the pasuk - specifically where he pauses and where he doesn't, will determine if the reading is correct or needs to be corrected (and reread correctly). Specifically, if the BK pauses after reading BAYOM HASH'LISHI and then continues with UVAYOM HASH'VI' YIT-HOR, he changes the meaning of the pasuk and it must be corrected.

BAYOM HASH'LISHI U'VAYOM HASH'VI' must be read without a pause, then pause before reading the word YIT-HOR.

This is not just a matter of careful vs sloppy reading; when the meaning of pasuk is distorted, it must be corrected. Sloppy pronunciation and/or accenting of words that does not change the meaning, need not be corrected.

Important to say that correcting a BK should be done quietly and usually only be the gabbai - not screamed out from the congregation, which can embarrass the BK.

Chukat consists of Bamidbar 19, which is the 22 p'sukim of Parshat Para. In Chukat, the first 17 of those p'sukim are in the Kohen portion of the sedra; the other five begin the Levi aliya.

Bamidbar 20 (29 p'sukim) tells of the passing of Miriam in the month of Nisan (our tradition is that it was the 10th of the month, although the Torah only mentions the month). That makes it exactly one year before Bnei Yisrael crossed the Jordan River into Eretz Yisrael. She was 127 years old.

With Miriam's death, the miraculous well that accompanied the people throughout their wanderings, ceased to exist. The people complained bitterly about their thirst.

HaShem commanded Moshe and Aharon to take The Staff and gather the people. They (note the plural) were instructed to speak to the rock and that water would come from it for the people and their flocks. Moshe struck the rock twice - rather than speak to it - and yet plentiful water came for the people and their flocks.

HaShem declared to both Moshe and Aharon that because they missed the opportunity to sanctify G-d's Name (the people had already witnessed water coming from a rock that was struck; speaking to it would have been a greater Kiddush HaShem), neither of them would lead the people into Eretz Yisrael.

Still in perek 20, Moshe sent messengers to Edom to ask for permission to pass

through their territory. Edom refused to allow it. And since we were not allowed to fight against Edom, we changed course and went to Hor HaHar. There Aharon died - on the first of Av in the final year of wandering (we don't know that date until Parshat Mas'ei where Aharon's yahrzeit is identified - the only yahrzeit recorded in the Torah; any others we know only from Tradition). The mantle of the Kohen Gadol was passed on to Aharon's son, Elazar. The people mourned Aharon's passing for 30 days.

Bamidbar 21 tells us of the attack by and the defeat of the K'naani. Then further travels and SHIR HAB'EIR, the Song of the Well. Note that there are two songs related to water - one at the time of the Exodus and the other at the end of the Wandering in the Midbar. And then came the successful battles against Sichon, king of the Emori and Og, king of Bashan.

The sedra finishes with the first pasuk of perek 22 describing our arrival in Arvot Moav on the east side of the Jordan.

With 4 more sedras in Bamidbar and 11 in D'varim, we are already at our final Midbar location, preparing to enter the Holy Land.

JP - B'HA-ALO-T'CHA AND THE 20TH OF SIVAN

This Shabbat we read Parshat B'HA-ALO-T'CHA. Looks like a klutzy way to write the sedra's name, but it is this way to indicate correct pronunciation - especially of the SH'VA under the TAV.

Did you know that the last letter of the ALEF-BET is TAV, not TUF - as I always thought it was since I learned my ABCs (make that, my ALEF, BET, GIMELs).

Before we get into this week's sedra, let's go two days further, to the 20th of Sivan - this year, Monday, June 16th.

KAF SIVAN was almost the 6th Rabbinically legislated fast day on our calendar, following Tish'a b'Av, 17 Tamuz, Tzom Gedaliya, 10 Tevet, and Taanit Esther (not in sequential order).

Almost, but not quite. (A phrase, BTW, famously from *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy* by Douglas Adams.)

Maybe not a required fast day. Observed by relatively few. But doubtlessly, a date of tragedies.

To keep it short... 12th century classic blood libel - Jew killed a gentile child for its blood to be used in the baking of matza. 31 Jewish leaders given a choice of baptism or horrible death. They chose Kiddush HaShem.

Rabbeinu Tam and other French Baalei Tosafot declared the 20th of Sivan as a fast day.

Fast forward 500 years. Unspeakable massacres, referred to as G'ZEIROT TACH V'TAT, took place in the years of 5408 (TACH) and 5409 (TAT), corresponding to the secular years 1648 and 1649. The massacres actually raged on for the following 12 years. The Cossack hordes swarmed throughout Ukraine, Poland and Lithuania, wreaking havoc in their path and putting entire Jewish communities to the sword. Hundreds of Jewish communities in Poland and Ukraine were destroyed by the massacres. The Cossacks murdered unknown thousands of Jews, including instances in which they buried people alive, cut them to pieces and perpetrated far more horrible cruelties - many of their heinous deeds surpassed even those performed later by the Nazis.

The VAAD ARBA HA'ARATZOT, which at the time was the halachic and legislative body of all Polish and Lithuanian Jewry... declared that the 20th of

Sivan should be established (or confirmed) as a fast day.

In our time, back in 1982, the costliest battle of the war in Lebanon claimed the lives of about 30 IDF soldiers.

Indeed, a tragic day. You can find Slichot written for the day in some siddurim. Even without fasting, the day calls for remembering, for introspection, and T'shuva.

On to - or back to - Parshat B'ha-alo-t'cha.

It is the 36th of the 54 sedras of the Torah, the 3rd of 10 in Sefer Bamidbar.

It is written on 240 lines in a Sefer Torah; only 9 sedras are longer.

One of its parshiyot (a S'TUMA) is separated from the parshiyot before and after it by more than blank space (as is usual) - namely, backwards NUNs. Consequently, it is the "loneliest", most isolated of all parshiyot in the Torah. And, very well known - VAYHI BINSO'A HAARON... and UVNUCHO YOMAR...

The sedra has 5 mitzvot; 3 positives, 2 prohibitions. To illustrate how uneven the distribution of mitzvot is in the Torah, B'ha-alo- t'cha has more mitzvot than 28 other sedras, and fewer than 25 sedras. Only 5 mitzvot and it's in the top half.

Most striking about this sedra is the terrible downswing in its telling of the period of Israel's sojourn in the Midbar (Wilderness, better word than Desert).

The sedra starts with the Kohen Gadol's instructions concerning the lighting of the Menora. Then to the sanctity of the Leviyim.

Next is the bringing of the Korban Pesach - the first annual commemoration of the Exodus from Egypt. And the much-praised context of the commands regarding Pesach Sheini. Pesach Sheini is not just a mitzva among mitzvot. It is a manifestation of Second Chances. A concept that goes beyond the few men who complained that since they were Tamei from contact with dead bodies, they were not able to be part of the great mitzva of Korban Pesach, the ritual that identifies the individual as being part of Bnei Yisrael.

Then the Torah tell us of the making of the Chatzotzrot, the Silver Trumpets. Multi-purposed, they will be used to assemble the people, their N'si'im, and to signal when to begin traveling.

The comes the description of the Heavenly Clouds of Glory that protected the

people in the Midbar and that signaled when they camped, for how long, and when they were to travel and to where.

And finally, the people are ready to go. It is the first traveling since arrival at Har Sinai. We had arrived at Sinai and Rosh Chodesh Sivan 2448 (just so you know, that was 1312 bce). Following Revelation at Sinai and Matan Torah, we stayed at Sinai for almost a year, learning Torah and Mitzvot from the greatest teacher ever, and learning how to live as the People of Israel.

Having previously been taught the procedures for dismantling the Mishkan and traveling in the order of the Four Flag-Camps, the people were now actually on their way. To where? To Eretz Yisrael.

This first half of the sedra concludes with the backwards-NUNs bracketed p'sukim: "So it was, whenever the Ark set out, Moshe would say, Arise, HaShem, may Your enemies be scattered and may those who hate You flee from You. And when it came to rest he would say, Repose HaShem, among the myriads of thousands of Israel." (How many of you, dear readers, remember "playing Chumash" and scoring 500 points for finding the NUNs?)

And then everything went south!

Complaints. HaShem's response of deadly fire. Moshe's pleading to G-d and the fire stopped.

More complaints, this time about the Manna, the miraculous bread from Heaven that sustained the people day after day. This time, G-d was EXCEEDINGLY angry (so to speak) with the people, and so was Moshe. This time he did not pray that we should be forgiven; he expressed despair at the impossibility of the situation. He expresses doubt in his ability to lead the people on his own.

G-d's response is for Moshe to gather 70 elders of high caliber who will receive some of the holy spirit from Moshe and be able to share the burdens of leadership.

G-d's response to the people's complaints about the Manna is met - not with the satisfying culinary response of the previous time the people asked for meat. This time, quail was to descend in unimagined quantity and the people would be severely punished for their complaints and lack of faith and HAKARAT HATOV.

The sedra ends with the LASHON HARA spoken by Miriam to Aharon and

Miriam's being afflicted with TZARAAT.

From the lofty events of the first half of the sedra, to an unbelievable mess in the second half. And the sin of the spies and Korach's rebellion are to come shortly.

Long piece; not too many numbers. But much food for thought for all of us.

JP - POST SHAVUOT notes

We call them the SHALOSH REGALIM, the Three Pilgrimage Festivals - PESACH, SHAVUOT, SUKKOT.

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Naso is 'only' in 5th place among the sedras for the number of parshiyot it has - 18 open parshiyot (P'TUCHA) and 8 closed parshiyot (S'TUMA).

The Torah has a total of 674 parshiyot, which averages to almost 12.5 parshiyot per sedra. Sedras range from two of them, each of which consists of a single very long parsha (VAYEITZEI and MIKEITZ), to KI TEITZEI which is made up of 44 parshiyot.

FYI, parshiyot are like paragraphs in a Sefer Torah. A Parsha P'tucha begins at the beginning of a line, the previous parsha finishing somewhere on the previous line, with the rest of the line left blank. A S'TUMA begins on the same line that the previous parsha ended, with a blank space between them.

Parshiyot range from 148 and 146 p'sukim for the ones that are full sedras, to the tiny two-word parsha which share a pasuk with three other parshiyot

- LO TIRTZACH... You shall not murder...

With 5846 p'sukim in the Torah, parshiyot average 8.76 p'sukim.

One other number for Naso is how many of the 613 mitzvot are from it.

18 mitzvot; 7 positive, 11 prohibitions - the most of Bamidbar's 10 sedras

18 might not seem to be that many mitzvot, but only 9 sedras (of 54) in the Torah have more mitzvot than Naso.

Let's finish this week's column with a gimatriya (numeric value). Among the many topics in Naso, we find Birkat Kohanim, which consists of three p'sukim - Y'VARECH'CHA... YA'EIR... YISA... The total gimatriya for these three p'sukim is 2718. This matches a pasuk in Parshat Balak - Bamidbar 22:41, "In the morning, Balak took Bil'am, and brought him to the High Altars of Baal, where he could see [as far as] the outer edges of the [Israelite] people."

We can say, numerically, that G-d's blessing to His People, via the Kohanim, protects us from the Bil'ams and Balaks of the world, who would seek to destroy us.

Gimatriya Matches do not prove anything, but they do serve to call our attention to a point to ponder.

Shabbat Shalom and Happy Pondering.

JP - BAMIDBAR - THE BOOK & THE SEDRA

Before we get into this week's sedra, let's take a look at two dates this week that already were, but belong in this column.

Yom Yerushalayim, this past Monday, the 28th of Iyar, does not get pre- or postponed like Yom HaAtzma'ut; it is always celebrated on the 28th of Iyar. It celebrates the reunification of Yerushalayim and other aspects of the victory of the Six Day War. It behooves us to acknowledge HaShem's Miracles and express of HAKARAT HATOV, our gratitude to Him. That acknowledgement is no way diminishes our appreciation for the IDF, nor our heartfelt shouts of KOL HAKAVOD TZAHAL.

BTW, Iyar 28's other claim to fame is that it is the yahrzeit of Sh'muel haNavi.

Yom Yerushalayim cannot fall on a Tuesday, Thursday, or Shabbat - LO GAHAZ. YY is exactly one week before Shavuot, which is LO GAHAZ, too.

Monday is its least common day on which it can fall. To illustrate how unevenly the calendar 'distributes' its dates from year to year, YY was on a Monday four years ago, and will not fall on Monday again for 20 years.

Iyar has 29 days in our fixed calendar. Therefore, Rosh Chodesh Sivan is only one day. Being two days after YY, it cannot fall on a Thursday, Shabbat, or Monday. Re-ordering the days of the week, R"Ch Sivan is LO B'HAZ.

And now to Bamidbar. (Some people like to call it B'MIDBAR, pronouncing the word as it actually occurs at the beginning of the sedra, but without the other word it shares a phrase with - B'MIDBAR SINAI - the common pronunciation of the Book and sedra is Bamidbar.)

In English, it is called NUMBERS - and with good justification. But don't think this is a name unconnected to Judaism. In fact, its second name is SEFER HA-P'KUDIM, the Book of Counting.

The sedra of Bamidbar is the third longest sedra in the Torah, with 159 p'sukim written on 263 lines (that's more than 6 and a quarter columns). It drops to 13th place in words (1823) due to it having one of the shortest

p'sukim in the Torah.

There are no mitzvot of the Torah's 613 (TARYAG) in Parshat Bamidbar. In all, 17 sedras have no mitzvot; Bamidbar is the largest sedra among them.

To deserve the name NUMBERS, this week's sedra has numbers galore. Starting with a count of the adult male population of each of the 12 tribes with a total of 603,550 men age 20 and up.

Note that the iconic number of the population is SHISHIM RIBO, 60 myriad, which is 600,000.

G-d tells Moshe that the tribe of Levi is not to be counted together with the rest of the tribes. A separate count follows later.

That first counting is followed by another count of the adult males - same numbers, but this second time there are also totals given for the four camps that made up all the Israelites - three tribes each for the flag-camps of Yehuda (with Yissachar & Zevulun), Reuven (with Shimon & Gad), Efrayim (with Menashe & Binyamin), and Dan (with Asher & Naftali).

Next comes the count of the Leviyim, from the age of one month and on. The purpose (one of the purposes?) of this count was for the mass exchange of Leviyim for the B'chorim (firstborns) of all the other tribes.

Their total is given as 22,000 - even though the sum of the counts of the three family units of Levi comes to 22,300. Commentaries explain the discrepancy by telling us that the extra 300 Leviyim were themselves firstborns and they would not be included in the switch of B'chorim by the Leviyim.

Non-Levi B'chorim were counted next, totaling 22,273. The extra 273 firstborns were to be redeemed for five silver shekels each; the 22,000 firstborns were swapped one-to-one with the 22,000 Leviyim.

Finally, for Parshat Bamidbar, we have a second count of Leviyim, this time just males between the ages of 30 and 50 years old - the workforce of Shevet Levi, for dismantling the Mishkan, packing the wagons that were to carry the parts from one encampment to the next one, and then to set up the Mishkan once again in the new place. Family Kehat carried the

special furnishings of the Mishkan on their shoulders. Kehat was counted first, at the end of Parshat Bamidbar, and the details of their work is spelled out. The counts of Ger'shon and Merari are found in the beginning of the following sedra, Naso.

I am sure you will agree that NUMBERS is a perfect name for the Book of Bamidbar. And there are still numbers and countings still to come.

SHAVUOT

Motza'ei Shabbat is to final Omer count - 49 days which are 7 weeks.

Bamidbar is most often the sedra that immediately precedes Shavuot. (Some people think that Bamidbar ALWAYS precedes Shavuot, but "it ain't so".) In Chutz LaAretz, it's 90% Bamidbar / 10% Naso. In Israel, it's 80/20.

This year, Erev Shavuot is on Sunday, June 1st and Shavuot is Monday, 6 Sivan (June 2nd) in Israel, and Monday and Tuesday, outside of Israel.

Although Shavuot is its own Yom Tov, it is important to also view it as the culmination of Pesach. Shavuot's well-known nickname is Z'MAN MATAN TORATEINU, the time of the giving of the Torah - indicates one of the two goals of our nationhood. The other is coming to Eretz Yisrael and the building of the Beit HaMikdash. Another name for Shavuot is YOM HA-BIKURIM. This name clearly points to Shavuot being the celebration of our being in Eretz Yisrael and having the Beit HaMikdash.

Shabbat Shalom & Chag Samei'ach, dear readers.

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JP - B'HAR-B'CHUKOTAI

With the third double-sedra in four weeks, it is time to take a closer look at the Double-Sedra Story.

There are 54 sedras in the Torah; there are 7 pairs of sedras that are sometimes read individually and sometimes combined.

Taking them not quite in order, we start with Tazria & M'tzora (TM) and Acharei & K'doshim (AK). They are read combined during 12-month years and are read separately during 13-month years. That gives us a frequency of 12 out of 19 years (63.16%), combined and 7 of 19 years (36.84%), separate.

The same goes for B'har & B'chukotai (BB), except that in Israel they are also separated in a 12-month year when Pesach begins Friday night - Shabbat. In that year-type - which happens to be the most frequent of all year-types at 18.05% of all years - we in Israel resume Parshat HaShavua on the day that is the Eighth Day of Pesach outside of Israel. We get ahead of Chutz LaAretz in Parshat HaShavua, and by separating BB, we get back in sync with the rest of the Jewish World. Frequencies for BB outside of Israel are the same as TM and AK; in Israel, BB are combined only 45.11% of the time and read separately, 54.89% of the time.

Vayak'hel & P'kudei (VP) "behave" like TM and AK, except that they are also read separately in, what happens to be the current year, 5785, and which is the rarest of year-types at only 3.31% of all years. VP combined 59.85% and separate 40.15% of the time.

Chukat & Balak (CB) are never combined in Israel. They are read together abroad whenever Shavuot falls on Friday - regardless of whether the year is a P'SHUTA or a M'UBERET. This occurs 28.57% of years. In Israel, there is no second day of Shavuot, so we read Parshat HaShavua when the special reading for the second day of Shavuot is read abroad, getting out of sync until Chukat-Balak, after which, we are back in sync. CB are the least combined of the double sedras.

Matot & Mas'ei (MM) is/are the most-often combined double - only read separately in 13-month years when Rosh HaShana was on Thursday and

Friday. That gives a combined MM frequency of 89.47% and only 10.53% of the time are MM read separately.

In Israel, however, MM are also split when Pesach is Shabbat to Friday here and Shabbat to Shabbat abroad. MM is the first available double for us to split and get back in sync with Parshat HaShavua. Israel's frequencies of MM combined/separate are 70.49/20.51 - still the most-often combined double sedras.

It turns out that the numeric values (gimatriya) of the first pasuk of Matot and the first pasuk of Mas'ei match at 3324. No other first p'sukim of any sedras match each other. This doesn't prove anything, but it is an interesting numeric 'confirmation' of the combined-ness of MM.

Which brings us to the two shortest sedras of the Torah, Nitzavim and Vayeilech (NV). They are combined when there is no Shabbat between Yom Kippur and Sukkot (60.46%) and read separately when there is a Shabbat between Yom Kippur and Sukkot (39.54%).

When NV are combined, Ha'azinu is Shabbat Shuva; when separate, Vayeilech is Shabbat Shuva. Nitzavim is ALWAYS read on the last Shabbat of the year, the one right before Rosh HaShana - sometimes with Vayeilech and sometimes alone. This means that Vayeilech sometimes is read on the first Shabbat of the year, sometimes on the last Shabbat of the year, sometimes on both and sometimes it is not read at all during a particular year.

Okay, back to BB. They have 57 and 78 p'sukim respectively, each on the short side and 'comfortable' to combine. (Unlike MM, a pair of relatively long sedras.)

Although with "only" 24 mitzvot, B'har does not seem to be in the major league of mitzva sedras, the fact is that there are only 7 sedras with more mitzvot than B'har (46 sedras with fewer). Yet there are only 4 sedras smaller than B'har and 49 longer.

Even B'chukotai's 12 mitzvot puts it tied (with Va'etchanan) for 15th place.

And HaShem spoke to Moshe at Har Sinai, saying - the wording of this first pasuk of Parshat B'har gives rise to Rashi's famous question: MA INYAN

SH'MITA EITZEL HAR SINAI? - what does the Sabbatical Year have to do with Har Sinai? Meaning, what is the reason that the laws of Sh'mita are singled out by telling us that HaShem spoke to Moshe at Har Sinai, when all mitzvot were taught by HaShem to Moshe at Har Sinai.

In fact, MA INYAN SH'MITA EITZEL HAR SINAI? is Israeli slang for What does one thing have to do with the other. In English, we would say, What does that have to do with the price of tea in China? (Or some such similar expression.)

Rashi explains that we learn from here that all mitzvot WITH THEIR DETAILS were taught by HaShem to Moshe at Sinai. (Based on the Talmudic Principle that when one thing is singled out of a whole category, it comes to teach us something about the whole category - not just about itself.)

This coming Sunday night - Monday is Yom Yerushalayim. Celebrate it meaningfully; HAKARAT HATOV to HKBH, showing our gratitude to HaShem.

Torah by the Numbers

Welcome to a new column of the Jewish Press.

The plan is to present various calendar and Torah sedra facts, as well as both TorahStats and CalendarStats, as you will soon see, with additional comments here and there, and an occasional Gimatriya Match from the weekly sedra.

Let's start with LAG BaOmer, which falls on Thursday night / Friday, May 15-16. LAG BaOmer's Hebrew date is 18 Iyar, which has a much earlier significance compared with its Omer-related significance.

According to Tradition, the supply of matza, hastily baked when the People left Egypt, lasted a month. Thereafter, the people complained that they were hungry, and they received the Manna from HaShem for the first time, on the 18th of Iyar.

In our fixed calendar, LAG BaOmer cannot fall out on a Monday, Wednesday, or Shabbat. The frequencies for the days of the week on which it can fall are:

Sunday (31.89%), Tuesday (28.57%), Thursday (28.03%), and Friday (like this year, 11.51%).

FYI - there are 385 possible dates on the Jewish Calendar. Of them, 295 dates follow a pattern of three days of the week on which they cannot fall, three days of the week, as you can see above, on which they can fall with a frequency in the 30% range, and one day of the week on which they occur least frequently, specifically, 11.51% of years.

Interesting halachic fact: Although Ashkenazim take haircuts and shave on Lag BaOmer day, many Eidot of S'faradim do not. But when Lag is on Friday, they do take haircuts and shave in honor of Shabbat.

Parshat Emor

With Tazri'a-M'tzora read two weeks ago and Acharei-K'doshim read this past Shabbat, and B'har-B'chukotai coming up next Shabbat - this week's single parsha of Emor seems funnily out of place.

But, of course, it isn't out of place - it is right on time!

Let me put Emor into context. This past Shabbat, we, Bnei Yusrael were commanded - K'DOSHIM TIHYU - Be Holy. And the plethora of mitzvot in Parshat K'doshim give us the answer to the question - How are we supposed to be holy? How do we move in that direction? The answer - by doing mitzvot. Not just by going through the motion, but by doing mitzvot and chesed with enthusiasm, with proper kavana, with joy.

In Pirkei Avot, we find the statement, S'CHAR MITZVA, MITZVA - the reward for doing a mitzva is the mitzva itself. Or, perhaps it means, the reward for doing a mitzva is another mitzva to do.

A statement attributed to the Baal Shem Tov about the reward for doing mitzvot is:

S'CHAR MITZVA, SIMCHAT MITZVA, the reward for doing a mitzva is the joy of doing the mitzva.

Which brings us to this week's sedra, Parshat Emor.

It is the Avis, K2, Buzz Aldrin sedra? What does that mean? I'll tell you and you can use it at your Shabbat table as a riddle for your family and guests to figure out. (Even if they too read this column, you can still use it as a discussion starter for the sedra.)

Mitzvot are not at all evenly distributed throughout the Torah.

Take a look at the numbers, Book by Book:

B'reishit 3, Sh'mot 111, Vayikra 247, Bamidbar 52, D'varim 200.

B'reishit with 12 sedras and more p'sukim, words, and letters than all the other Books, has only 3 mitzvot of Taryag.

Vayikra, the smallest of the Chumashim, has the most mitzvot - 247. It's also the only Book of the Torah with mitzvot counted from all of its sedras.

There are 17 sedras in the Torah (almost a third of the 54 sedras in the Torah) with no mitzvot counted among the 613. Another 11 sedras have 1-3 mitzvot. Another 17 sedras have from 5-18 mitzvot. That leaves only 9 sedras with 20 or more mitzvot.

The sedra with the most is Ki Teitzei in D'varim with 74 mitzvot.

Emor is number 2 on the Torah's Mitzva Chart, with 63 mitzvot - 24 Mitzvot Asei (positive commandments) and 39 Mitzvot Lo Taasei (prohibitions).

And that's the answer to the riddle. Avis Rent-a-Car's slogan used to be (might still be) "We're number two. We try harder."

Mount Everest is the highest mountain in the world. How about the second highest? The answer is K2 (a.k.a. Qogir Feng or Mount Godwin Austen).

Ask someone who was the first man on the Moon, they will most probably remember that it was Neil Armstrong. But ask about the second man on the Moon. Fewer people will remember Buzz Aldrin (in whose honor Buzz Lightyear was named).

Emor has 124 p'sukim (average for the Torah is a bit over 108). 1614 words. 6106 letters.

It is significant to note that following K'doshim, with its challenge for all of us to Be Holy, Emor begins with the theme of the higher K'dusha that is the challenge for Kohanim. And then, even higher, for the Kohen Gadol.

Towards the end of Parshat Emor, we find the Portion of the Festivals - which is also the Torah reading for the second day of Pesach and the first day of Sukkot (the first two days of Sukkot outside of Israel).

Without more detail, we find that each holy day - first and seventh day of Pesach, the day of Shavuot, the day of Rosh HaShana, Yom Kippur, the first and eighth day of Sukkot (Sh'mini Atzeret) - have three mitzvot each: Abstain from Melacha, do not do Melacha, bring Korbanot Musaf. That does not include the mitzvot related to the Omer period or to Sukkot. There is so much more to share; hopefully, in future columns.

In the meantime, as we say, LAG SAMEI'ACH and SHABBAT SHALOM.