

LECH L'CHA

3rd sedra of 54;
3rd of 12 in B'reishit



Written on 208 lines, ranks 23rd

7 Parshiyot; 3 open, 4 closed

126 p'sukim - ranks 13th - same as R'ei;
smaller than R'ei in other categories

1686 words - ranks 18th

6336 letters - ranks 19th

Ranks 7 of 12 in B'reishit - all categories

Shorter than average p'sukim

MITZVOT

1 (positive) mitzva, namely, BRIT MILA

FYI, a total of 5 sedras have only one mitzva (another 17 have none and six have 2 or 3 - that accounts for 28 sedras, over half of the Torah's 54).

Aliya-by-Aliya Sedra Summary

[P>] and [S>] indicate start of a parsha p'tucha or s'tuma. X:Y is Perek:Pasuk of the beginning of the parsha; (Z) is the number of p'sukim in the parsha

Numbers in [square brackets] are the Mitzva-count of Sefer HaChinuch AND Rambam's Sefer HaMitzvot. A=ASEI (positive mitzva); L=LAV (prohibition). X:Y is the perek & pasuk from which the mitzva comes

Kohen - First Aliya 13 p'sukim - 12:1-13

[P> 12:1 (9)] G-d tells (note the softer VAYOMER rather than the harsher VAIDABER) Avra(ha)m to leave his land, birthplace and father's home and go to "the Land which I will show you".

SDT: LECH L'CHA - GO FOR YOU (or for yourself) - How do we understand L'CHA? Famous question.

Rashi says that it means "for your benefit", G-d was sending Avram to the future Eretz Yisrael so that he would father a great nation, so that he would be able to have children, so that he would be blessed.

Kli Yakar says that L'CHA is only used in the context of Eretz Yisrael.

Abravanel says that L'CHA means you, without your father (who had begun the journey with you).

Ramban says that it is the style of the language (without a necessary further meaning. *Otzar M'forshei HaP'shat*)

SDT: "Leave your land, birthplace, father's house." Ramban explains that each "point of departure" was progressively more difficult for Avraham. Leaving one's land is difficult, even more so if he was born there. Leaving one's family is most difficult. Ramban says that the Torah is showing us the great extent of Avraham's love of G-d.

Someone raises a question on this Ramban. What was so difficult in Avraham's leaving the place where he was ridiculed, persecuted and thrown into a fiery furnace for his beliefs? Would he not have left joyfully? The question actually carries the answer. The Ramban was pointing out a significant aspect of human nature. No matter how bad conditions are, how much a person wants a better life, there still will always remain a sadness and regret for the "good old days" and "the old country" - even when they weren't so good. This aspect of human nature explains a lot of Jewish History.

G-d promises that a great nation will descend from him (Avraham) and that he will be a blessing for all (his descendants and all the world).

SDT: Avra(ha)m is promised great rewards and benefits for listening to G-d. Yet pasuk 4 states that he went "as G-d had spoken to him". His "aliya" is considered a test of his faith. He passed this test because he came to the Land because G-d asked him to, not for any material promises.

The call to the Jew to come on Aliya continues. THE only real "right" reason to come is because it is a mitzva and this is what G-d wants of us. MITZVAT HASHEM and R'TZON HASHEM. All blessings that will follow are fringe benefits. And the difficulties one might encounter are parts of the test of our faith. Avraham Avinu led the way when

there were no Aliya Shlichim and no Nefesh b'Nefesh to facilitate Aliya and K'lita. Actually, there was One Shaliach Aliya and One supporter, and He is still and always in that role.

Coming on Aliya via EL AL is easier than Avraham and Sara had it. But it is no less of a command by G-d to the descendants of that special first couple of the Jewish People.

Avra(ha)m was 75 years old at the time he came to Eretz Yisrael with Sara(i), nephew Lot, and many people who were brought over to monotheism by Avra(ha)m and Sara(i).

[P> 12:10 (29)] Driven from the Land by a famine, Avraham and Sara go down to Egypt. Their plan is to say that they are brother and sister, rather than risk Avraham's being killed.

SDT: Midrash P'li'a points to this episode as proof that one may violate Shabbat to save someone else's life. The idea that one may violate one Shabbat so that he will be able to keep many Shabbatot of the future - from V'CHAI BAHEM - is part of the understanding of the Torah's permission (requirement) to violate Shabbat to save one's own life. This permission can be seen to be extended by Avraham's request to Sarah that she put herself at risk to save him. In other words, not only can one violate (most) mitzvot to save himself, one may also violate mitzvot to save someone else.

Levi - Second Aliya 11 p'sukim - 12:14-13:4

In Egypt, Sarai's beauty is noticed by the people and she is taken to Par'o's palace. Avra(ha)m, as her "brother", receives many gifts. Par'o and his household are afflicted by G-d as a punishment for taking Sarai. When Par'o realizes that Sarai is actually the wife of Avra(ha)m, he confronts him, returns Sarai to him and then asks them to leave Egypt.

Avra(ha)m and company, laden with riches, return to Eretz Yisrael via the Negev. Avra(ha)m returns to the Altar he had built and continues to proclaim G-d's Name.

Avraham, on the run from his hometown, a stranger in a strange land, has his challenges and tests. Avraham loaded with wealth and prominence, has new challenges and tests. Poverty and famine are tests; so is wealth. And it is hard to know which is harder. In the opening passage of Rosh Chodesh Benching, we ask G-d for many things -- long life, a life of peace, blessings, etc. There is one thing we ask for twice - Yir'at Shamayim, fear of G-d. Why? Because after asking for it the first time, we ask for a life of wealth and honor. If we are blessed with that, then we must humbly ask for Yir'at Shamayim again, because wealth sometimes blinds a person to his obligations to HaShem. It is relatively "easy" for a poor person to believe in

G-d and pray to Him. Wealthy people often have a difficult time with that. (There are other explanations, as well.)

Shlishi - Third Aliya 14 p'sukim - 13:5-18

Lot also has great wealth, too much to remain together with Avra(ha)m. Quarrels between their shepherds (caused by disparate ethical standards - we are taught) lead to a parting of the ways. Avra(ha)m gives Lot "first choice" of territory, and he (Lot) chooses the then fertile area of S'dom and the Jordan Valley. The Torah makes a point of telling us of the wickedness of S'dom society, an obvious criticism of Lot's distorted priorities.

This, too, is a recurring theme in Jewish life, containing warnings for us all - sadly, many Jews moved away from Jewish neighborhoods to places with country clubs, golf courses, and other "important" things; often the shuls and schools were far away from their new home... they seem to have made the Lot choice.

Only after Avra(ha)m parts company from Lot, does G-d once again appear to him, encouraging him to look over the whole land to the north, south, east, and west, which will some day belong to his descendants. G-d also tells him that his descendants will be too numerous to count. (Hidden message: They will sometimes be lowly,

like the dust of the ground, trodden underfoot by our enemies. Contrast this with the later comparison to the stars of the heavens, which has the opposite, positive, connotation.)

Avra(ha)m settles in Hevron and builds an altar to G-d.

SDT: One commentary says that although Avraham knew that his spirituality was compromised by Lot's presence, he nonetheless did not chase Lot away until he had no choice. Avraham felt a moral obligation to take care of Lot (including saving him even after they parted) even though he knew that G-d was "keeping His distance", so to speak, with Lot around. There are some interesting ramifications for us, of this behavior of Avraham's. How do we view time spent doing chessed and kiruv, or Hachnasat Orchim, at the expense of Torah learning and personal growth. Think about it.

R'vi'i - Fourth Aliya 20 p'sukim - 14:1-20

[P> 14:1 (24)] This portion tells of the battle between the Four Kings and the Five Kings and of the capture of S'dom, including Lot. When Avra(ha)m hears (from Og, "refugee" from the Flood) of Lot's capture he sets out to rescue him, taking with him a force of 318. Or...

Rashi refers to the Gemara which suggests that Avraham took only his

servant Eliezer with him to rescue Lot. The numeric value of the name Eliezer = 318. As G'matriyas go, this is one of many. What makes it very unusual, is that Rashi says it and bases it on a number in the text of the Torah.

Avra(ha)m launches a successful surprise attack and frees the people of S'dom. Victory is celebrated with a religious ceremony of thanking and blessing G-d in the presence of Malki-Tzedek (a.k.a. Sheim son of No'ach). A tithe of the spoils of war is given to this servant of G-d.

- Rashi tells us that AMRAFEL, king of Shin-ar is none other than NIMROD who was the one who tossed Avraham into the fiery furnace for challenging paganism in public and espousing belief in One G-d. Ironic, is it not, that Avraham has this opportunity to do successful battle against Nimrod.

- Malki-tzedek is king of Shalem. Onkeles identifies Shalem as Yerushalayim. SHALEM is the part of the city's name contributed by Sheim. Avraham gave it the first half after the Akeida - YERU.

The English version of SHALEM is SALEM. There are 30 (out of 50) US states with a Salem - some states have more than one). Salem, Massachusetts, is the biggest and most well-known.

There are 39 places in the world called Jerusalem (in 21 different countries). There are 5 Jerusalems in Mexico...

Chamishi 5th Aliya 10 p'sukim - 14:21-15:6

The king of S'dom offers Avra(ha)m great wealth. Avra(ha)m refuses to take as much as a "thread or shoelace".

Avra(ha)m did accept payment on behalf of his allies who helped him.

[S> 15:1 (21)] Afterwards, G-d appears to Avra(ha)m in a vision and again promises him great rewards for his faithfulness. Avra(ha)m, still childless, expresses his disappointment, but resignation, that Eliezer will be his heir. G-d assures Avra(ha)m that he will indeed have his own child to follow in his footsteps.

G-d then takes Avra(ha)m outdoors and promises him that his descendants will be as countless (and exalted) as the stars in the heavens.

The GR"A cites the Talmud's mention that Avraham Avinu was the first person to address G-d as "Adon" (Master). We acknowledge this by beginning Shacharit - Avraham's davening - with the poem Adon Olam. Furthermore, the reference to a thread and shoelace is linked the mitzvot of Talit and T'filin, both of which are also associated with Shacharit.

Being compared to dust and sand and to the stars is not just a matter of numerousness, but also to the quality of life. We can be like the dust of the ground - stepped on, trodden upon... Or

we can be as lofty, wonderful, grand as the stars of the heavens. The terms reflect the ups & downs of Jewish History.

Shishi - Sixth Aliya 37 p'sukim - 15:7-17:6

This portion begins with "the Covenant between the Pieces". (Part of this experience is actual, part is prophetic vision.) G-d tells Avra(ha)m that his descendants will be oppressed in a foreign land and will subsequently leave there with great wealth. The promise of the Land to Avra(ha)m is reiterated once more.

Both Rashi and Onkeles understand the terms M'SHULASH and M'SHULESHET to mean that Avraham took three each - calves, goats, and sheep for the BRIT BEIN HA-B'TARIM. Tos'fot and others define the term as "prime, of the best quality". They hold that there was only one each of the animals. Others say the animals were to be third-born or three years old or part of triplets.

The Living Torah by R' Aryeh Kaplan z"l

[S> 16:1 (16)] Sarai, being barren, gives her hand-maiden Hagar to Avra(ha)m (after 10 years in K'na'an) to bear him a child. When Hagar becomes pregnant, she taunts her mistress. Hagar then flees from Sarai's retaliation. An angel finds her, promises that her child, too, will sire a countless multitude, that her son to be born

shall be called Yishmael, and that she is now to return to Sarai.

Yishmael is born when Avra(ha)m is 86 years of age.

[S> 17:1 (14)] When Avra(ha)m is 99...

G-d appears to him and asks him to "be complete". G-d changes Avra(ha)m's name to Avraham, symbolizing his role as father and spiritual guide to great nations. Once again Avraham is promised "countless" progeny.

SDT: Notice the jump from 86 years old to 99 years old. What happened during the 'missing' 13 years? The answer is, nothing that we need to know about; no lessons for us to learn. The Torah is not a complete journal or history book. The Torah tells us what G-d wants to tell us because of the mitzvot and moral lessons we can (and should) learn.

Sh'VII Seventh Aliya 21 p'sukim - 17:7-27

G-d promises that a special relationship will always exist between Himself and Avraham's descendants, and repeats the promise of the Land. G-d reveals the form that the "Covenant" is to take - the circumcision of all males [2, A215 17:10].

MITZVAnotes

This mitzva is the first "non-natural" commandment. Until this point, the 7 categories of Noahide mitzvot are all logical, rational, reasonable, common-sense laws. This 8th mitzva, for the 8th day, represents the challenge to the Jew to rise above nature and complete his spiritual form just as he is being commanded to complete his physical form.

The mitzva is ideally performed on the 8th day, counting the day on which the baby was born - even if he was born right before sunset. Mila may not take place at night. Only an 8th day Mila (as opposed to a Brit that was postponed because of health reasons, for example) can be done on Shabbat. A baby delivered by C-section on Shabbat, will have his Brit on the following day, Sunday (the baby's 9th day). In other words - due to a technicality based on the analysis of the text in Tazri'a, only an 8th day Brit of a natural birth can take place on Shabbat.

The mitzva of Mila is "repeated" in Parshat Tazri'a. Its specific wording there, teaches us some details.

With the two texts dealing with BRIT, it is noteworthy that most mitzva-counters count MILA from LECH L'CHA rather than TAZRI'A. Lech L'cha's context is the story of Avraham Avinu. In Tazri'a we have a straightforward command - Speak to the people of

Israel... on the 8th day, you SHALL circumcise...

Most significant in the matter of Brit Mila is this: The physical removal of the foreskin is only part of the mitzva of Mila. This can be seen by looking at the brachot that are said for the Brit. The first bracha is AL HAMILA. This bracha is immediately followed by a second Birkat HaMitzva (very unusual to say two mitzva-brachot for the performance of one mitzva), "to enter him into the covenant of Avraham". This is not just a HINENI MUCHAN UMZUMAN type of introduction to a mitzva, not a peripheral concept, but an integral part of the mitzva. The challenge of raising the child to be a good Jew and a good person is an obligation of the parents which is part of MILA (we can say) and THE part of the mitzva that takes much more time and energy than "the cut". The context of Lech L'cha says it all. Its choice as the "official source" of Mila helps us understand this important mitzva.

Note too that when a Mohel does the Mila at the behest of the father, the Mohel says the Mila bracha, but the father nonetheless retains the second bracha (and Shehecheyanu). Parents can use an agent to perform the MILA part of BRIT MILA, but the BRIT part remains theirs.

- Note that the gimatriya of the word B'RIT is 612. Add the one mitzva of MILA for a total of 613. We can say that the

mitzva of circumcision combines the single mitzva of MILA with a commitment to educate and bring the child up to know, love, and observe all the other 612 mitzvot, for a grand total that represents the complete Torah. This echoes the idea that G-d asked Avraham to become complete before Him, and that Mila is the sign of that completeness.

[S> 17:15 (13)] G-d then changes Sarai's name to Sarah. Name changes represent changes in character, role, and destiny. G-d promises that Sarah will bear the true heir of Avraham. Avraham laughs with joy upon hearing that he will be a father at 100, and Sarah a mother at 90. He thought that Yishmael was the son that G-d had repeatedly promised him, but G-d assures him that it will be Yitzchak who will fill that role.

Yishmael will also be blessed and give rise to great nations, but the Covenant will be passed down through Yitzchak. Avraham circumcises himself (at age 99), Yishmael (at age 13), and other male members of his household, in fulfillment of G-d's command.

Haftara 21 p'sukim Yeshayahu - 40:27-41:16

This passage is the national counterpart of some of the personal experiences of Avraham. Just as G-d made promises to Avraham Avinu, so He makes promises to the Children of

Israel. Just as Avraham tenaciously clings to faith in G-d, so too do his descendants. Endurance, confidence, victory, self-perfection - these qualities are shared by THE ancestor and his descendants, us.

We can see in the sedra-haftara pair, Maasei Avot Siman L'banim, the deeds of the ancestors set the patterns for the their descendants.