



Volume 31  
No. 40

## Bemidbar בְּמִדְבָּר

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Shavuot starts on Motsei Shabbat. Candles should not be lit in London before 10.20pm, Jerusalem at 8.25pm. Shavuot ends in London on Monday night at 10.22pm.

**In loving memory of David Yochanan ben Moshe**



“God spoke to Moshe in the Wilderness of Sinai, in the Tent of Meeting, on the first of the second month, in the second year after their exodus from the land of Egypt, saying...” (Bemidbar 1:1).

## Sidrah Summary: Bemidbar

### 1st Aliya (Kohen) – Bemidbar 1:1-19

On Rosh Chodesh of the second month after the Exodus from Egypt, God instructs Moshe and Aharon to take a census of men above the age of 20. (The Talmud adds that men above 60 were not counted). The leader of each tribe is to be present when his tribe is counted. The name of each leader is stated. The census is carried out as commanded.

### 2nd Aliya (Levi) – 1:20-54

The Torah lists the results of the census. The tribe of Reuven numbers 46,500; Shimon 59,300; Gad 45,650; Yehuda 74,600; Yissachar 54,400; Zevulun 57,400; Ephraim 40,500; Menashe 32,200; Binyamin 35,400; Dan 62,700; Asher 41,500; Naftali 53,400. This comes to a total of 603,550 men. The tribe of Levi is not counted with the rest of the tribes. They are assigned to dismantle and transport the *Mishkan* (Tabernacle) when the nation travels in the desert, as well as to guard the *Mishkan* when it is stationary.

### 3rd Aliya (Shlishi) – 2:1-34

God tells Moshe and Aharon how to position the 12 tribes (other than Levi) around the *Mishkan*. They are to be organised into four groups of three tribes, each group led by one particular tribe. To the east of the *Mishkan* are the tribes of Yehuda, Yissachar and Zevulun, led by Yehuda. To the south are the tribes of Reuven, Shimon and Gad, led by Reuven. To the west are the tribes of Ephraim, Menashe and Binyamin, led by Ephraim. To the north are the tribes of Dan, Asher and Naftali, led by Dan.

**Question:** *What was the name of the leader of the tribe of Yehuda (2:3)? Answer on bottom of p.6.*

### 4th Aliya (Revi'i) – 3:1-13

Aharon's sons are listed. God tells Moshe to bring the tribe of Levi to Aharon in order to assist him in his work as the *Kohen Gadol*. The tribe of

Levi is to take over the role that had been designated for the firstborn, who were sanctified on the night of the Exodus from Egypt, when the Egyptian firstborn were killed and they survived.

### 5th Aliya (Chamishi) – 3:14-39

God tells Moshe to count the men of the tribe of Levi, aged from one month upwards. The count is divided up into three main groups, according to the descendants of Levi's three sons, Gershon, Kehat and Merari. Each main group, whose constituent families are also listed, is given a different location in relation to the *Mishkan*. The overall number of Levi'im counted in the census is 22,000.

**Point to Consider:** *Why were the Levi'im counted separately to the rest of the tribes? (see Rashi to 1:49)*

### 6th Aliya (Shishi) – 3:40-51

Moshe is told to count the male firstborn and to 'replace' them with the Levi'im. The firstborn number 22,273. The extra 273 firstborn (over and above the 22,000 Levi'im) are to give five shekels each in order to redeem their status.

### 7th Aliya (Shevi'i) – 4:1-19

The specific role of each of the three main families is now detailed, one in this week's sidrah, two in next week's sidrah. The family of Kehat are to take down, transport and re-assemble the holy Ark (*Aron*), the Table (*Shulchan*), the Menorah, the Golden Altar (*Mizbeach Ha'zahav*) and the vessels used together with these features of the *Mishkan*.

### Haftarah

The start of the haftarah is linked to the sidrah, with the Children of Israel compared to "the sand of the sea, which can neither be measured nor counted". The prophet Hoshea then goes on to liken the sinful Children of Israel to an unfaithful wife. However, they will eventually return to 'their husband' (God), who will take them back with kindness and mercy



United Synagogue Daf Hashavua

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## A Power Beyond

by Rabbi Zvi Cohen, Kingsbury United Synagogue



This week's sidrah describes the encampment of the Israelites in the desert. Each individual had a fixed place within both their family and their tribe, with the *Mishkan* as the central focus in the middle, showing that service

of God was supposed to be the most important factor in everyone's lives.

The verses also relate how they packed up in order to travel. Their personal possessions are not mentioned, but rather how the items in the *Mishkan* were wrapped up for transportation.

The outer cover on all items was *tachash* hide, with one exception – the *Aron* – the Ark of Testimony. Due to its great holiness, explains the Ramban (Nachmanides 1194-1270), it was first covered with the *Parochet* (the partition curtain that normally hid it from view), then *tachash* hide to shield it from the rain. Finally it had another cover on top, made from *techelet* – turquoise wool, symbolising its holiness, as this colour makes one think of the blue sky and the heavens.

Rabbi Meir Yehuda Leibish (the Malbim d.1879) says that the cover for the *Aron* was different because its holiness, as symbolised by the *techelet*, had an effect on its surrounding environment, even though the *Aron* itself was hidden away. One who looked at the *Mishkan* would have got the message that Torah learning, as represented by the *Aron*, resonates spiritually beyond the location where it is being studied.

Rabbi Avraham Gurwitz (the Rosh Yeshiva at Gateshead Yeshiva) writes that this lesson can help us to understand a Mishnah that is recited as part of the morning prayers: "These are the mitzvot whose fruit a person enjoys in this world

and the main reward is stored up for the world to come" (see green siddur, p.16).

The main reward we receive from our mitzvot is not in this world. However, there are some mitzvot that, as well as bringing us closer to God through obeying His instruction, also help other people. These are then listed in the Mishnah whose 'fruits we enjoy' even in this world, honouring ones parents, acts of kindness, coming to shul early (which helps ensure a minyan and the correct environment in which to pray), hospitality, visiting the sick, concentration in prayer (our prayers are in the plural and therefore assist others) and making peace between anyone.

Up to this point, it is easy to understand the Mishnah's list of mitzvot which assist others, but the final one, the study of Torah, may not at first seem to be helping anyone other than the one who studies. Yet based on the Malbim's comment about the *Aron*, we see that the very act of learning Torah has a far-reaching effect which benefits the entire community and elevates everyone's spiritual standing.

King David, expressing his innermost desires said: "One thing I *asked* of God, that shall I *seek*, that I dwell in His house all the days of my life" (Tehilim/Psalms 27:4 – see green siddur, p.234). The Vilna Gaon (Rabbi Eliyahu Kramer 1720-97) explains that "asking" refers to what we want for ourselves, "seeking" refers to what we want for others. King David was praying to God that his Torah study would benefit others.

Bemidbar is always the sidrah that precedes Shavuot, the festival of the receiving of the Torah. What better message could we take with us, as we prepare to hear again the words we first heard at Sinai.

# The Book of Ruth: A Stranger in a Familiar Land

by Rabbi Dr. Chaim Burman, US Rabbinic Fellow



The story of Ruth is an inspiring account of suffering, dedication and – ultimately – redemption. Since the custom to read it on Shavuot is cited by the Midrash, we can assume that this has been practised for well over a millennium.

However, there is no mention of Shavuot in the narrative, nor of the giving of the Torah, the event that we celebrate on this festival. So why is Megillat Ruth read on Shavuot?

There are a number of suggested answers. Some rabbinic commentators note that Ruth was the ancestor of King David, who was born and died on Shavuot. Rabbi David Abudraham (mid-14th century) explains that the story of Ruth happened at the time of the barley and wheat harvests and Shavuot is referred to by the Torah as the Festival of the Wheat Harvest.

Rabbi Abudraham cites another reason, alluded to by the Midrash, which locates a profound parallel between the themes of Megillat Ruth and Shavuot.

In today's working world, after an extended period of work, some employees are granted a "sabbatical" break, where they typically relax, invest time in projects of personal or charitable interest that they do not usually have time for, or undergo further professional development.

Historically, there were great rabbinic figures who also went on a kind of sabbatical, but with a very different purpose. Although they may have been figures of esteem in their local community, they would journey to a place where no-one knew them and live there for a period, as a stranger in a strange place. These self-imposed "personal exiles" were a way that these people felt that they could disconnect from their daily routine and re-orientate their perspective,

so as to become better individuals, scholars and leaders.

The Rambam (Maimonides 1135-1204) explains that people who come to a community as strangers lose the personal status that they acquired over years and must start anew. Humility is a prerequisite for receiving the Torah. Indeed, the Midrash notes that Torah is likened to water which always flows downwards, as it is only acquired by a humble person.

It was for this reason that, before the Jewish people received the Torah at Sinai, they had to undergo a process of conversion, including *brit mila*; to immersion in a *mikvah* and bringing a special offering (see Talmud Keritot 9a). It was as if, before receiving the Torah, they had to start their lives afresh, almost like strangers in a new place. They were given a blank spiritual slate, and had to start again on their spiritual journey. The enduring message is that Judaism is best lived with freshness and wonder, far removed from complacency.

We learn how to live with this perspective from Ruth. Although she was comfortable and settled in her home country Moav, she exemplified the willingness to become a stranger for the sake of her convictions. She followed her mother-in-law to a new place even though she would be a stranger there, because she knew that was the only way to live a fulfilled and meaningful Jewish life.



# Shavuot – The Power of Torah Study

by Rabbi Yoni Birnbaum, Hadley Wood Jewish Community



Professor Carl Newport's book, *Deep Work: Rules for Focused Success in a Distracted World* (Piatkus, 2016) has become a classic in recent years. Newport's basic premise is that the ability to work "deeply" is

an increasingly rare commodity in today's world, so that anyone who can master it will have a huge advantage over others. That being the case, he provides excellent practical strategies for overcoming the distractions that have led to the situation we find ourselves in, chief amongst them the smartphone.

Newport's book resonates very powerfully in the context of Shavuot. We celebrate the Giving of the Torah. We also celebrate the privilege we have to engage in the study of the Torah, something that the Jewish people have treasured for millennia. This is demonstrated by the widespread custom of staying up all night on Shavuot engaged in Torah study.

Carl Newport's observations bring a new, profound, dimension to this practice. If you want to understand the power of deep work, Newport writes, visit the Keneseth Israel Synagogue in Spring Valley, New York at 6.00am on a standard weekday morning and watch the 20 or so people studying Talmud before morning prayers.

Newport states that he was astounded to discover that the ancient Jewish practice known as *limmud haTorah lishmah*, meaning 'Torah study for its own sake', fits perfectly with the latest research into the transformative power of deep work and its ability to vastly improve the way we think, as well as our overall levels of productivity. Studying Torah in depth may be challenging. It requires immense concentration, and a mental juggling act of balancing multiple concepts simultaneously in order to understand

the text. Studying in a shallow way simply does not work. The power and potential of Torah study *only* comes through training oneself to think deeply.

Therefore, it turns out that there is an optimal solution for the distracted age we live in, and it lies right at the heart of our ancient tradition. Real, serious, deep Torah study. A transformative type of study that will improve the way we think and concentrate throughout the entire week.

Of course, the great thing is that it doesn't have to be in a shul at 6.00am, or through staying up all night to study, as many have the custom to do on Shavuot. There are multiple outstanding lectures that take place across the community and online, as well as fantastic English translations of classic Jewish texts available for those who would prefer to study alone.

If at all possible, Torah study of the 'deep work' sort should contain two key elements. First, like the early morning study group that so impressed Carl Newport, it should take place daily. Second, however short, the time should be free from distractions. Put the phone on airplane mode and study from an old-fashioned book. Not only will your ability to concentrate improve significantly, but you will achieve it through connecting with the timeless wisdom of our faith.



# The Greatness of Ruth

by Rebbetzen Lisa Levene, Belmont United Synagogue, Ma'ayan



On Shavuot, we read Megillat Ruth. Such was the greatness of Ruth that she is the only woman in all of Tanach (the Hebrew Bible) to be referred to as an “*Eishet Chayil*” (a woman of valour). In fact, our Talmudic

Sages suggest that the last three lines of the poem by that name, which we sing on Friday nights, refer specifically to Ruth. The first of these lines reads: “Many women have achieved valour, but you have surpassed them all” (Mishlei/Proverbs 31:29).

Ruth’s example, notably her modesty, kindness, loyalty and faithfulness in the face of adversity, is genuinely inspiring. She was a princess with everything material at her disposal and yet she sacrificed it all in order to pursue truth. She is an example of a person who displayed tremendous self-sacrifice for the sake of doing what is right.

When one looks at the text, it is unclear at what point Ruth, who was born a Moabite, actually accepted Judaism upon herself. It is clear that when she arrived back in Bethlehem with Naomi after the loss of her husband, she was fully keeping the laws of the Torah, yet it is not disclosed when her conversion took place.

It is also not stated why Ruth came to the conclusion that she should convert to Judaism. However, reading between the lines of the text, we might tentatively make some suggestions as to how Ruth came to her conclusions:

1. She knew that the national revelation had taken place centuries previously at Sinai, when 600,000 Jewish people experienced and bore witness to God’s presence. She knew rationally that this was a people who were eyewitnesses to a clear, unique, irrefutable demonstration of truth, something that was unprecedented and has never been repeated.

2. Perhaps she detected the Divine wisdom of the Torah through the honesty and realism of the text, which doesn’t just detail our national successes but also cites our failures, struggles and imperfections.

3. Perhaps she was inspired by the content of the Torah, that clearly infers its Divine authorship, including phenomena that no human being would ever be able to guarantee, such as the promise of our national survival and our relationship to the Land of Israel.

When you look at Ruth’s life, it is full of struggles and heartache – she lost her father-in-law and her husband; she left her home of luxury; she returned penniless to Israel with her mother-in-law, to face ridicule and humiliation. She did this all with a conviction that God cared. With hindsight, as we see the events unfold, we see Divine Providence guiding events and rewarding Ruth, who eventually married Boaz and became the grandmother of no less than King David.

We could all write a megillah about our own lives. With hindsight, we often see God’s hand in so many of the challenges that we encountered. Yet like Ruth, we must strive to live in the present, face our challenges with self-confidence and try to internalise the feeling that God is by our side, guiding events.



Answer: Nachshon ben Aminadav

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**Daf Hashavua**

10 September 2018 1 Tishrei 5779  
Candles for Second Night Rosh Hashanah should be lit after 8.15pm. Rosh Hashanah ends in London on Tuesday night at 8.12pm

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No. 1

## Rosh Hashanah ראש השנה

The Fast of Gedaliah is on Wednesday, starting at 4.47am and ending at 8.04pm

In loving memory of Susi and Freddie Bradfield  
Sara Gitel bat Mordechai Menachem ז"ל and Yaacov ben Zvi ז"ל

### Shana Tova



From The US & the Daf Hashavua Team

Israel...  
Surprisingly, as  
...were punished...  
...of God, while Moshe...  
...did likewise at the

#### Rosh Hashanah

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# THE TRIBE SCRIBE

BEMIDBAR - SHAVUOT: UNITED WE STAND!

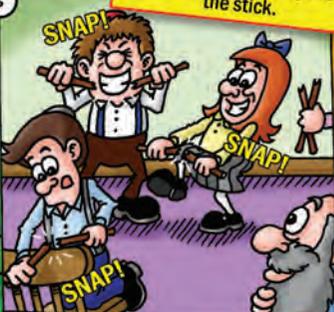
SHAVUOT CELEBRATES THE JEWISH PEOPLE RECEIVING THE TORAH AT MOUNT SINAI. THE TORAH TEACHES US THAT THE JEWISH PEOPLE CAMPED AT MOUNT SINAI AS ONE PEOPLE WITH ONE HEART - THEY WERE UNITED TO RECEIVE THE TORAH. IN PARASHAT BEMIDBAR THE JEWISH PEOPLE CAMPED AND TRAVELLED AS ONE BIG UNIT.

I'M WITH YOU ON THAT ONE DAN! WE ALL STAND TO GAIN WHEN WE WORK TOGETHER. OUR STORY THIS WEEK DEMONSTRATES WHAT A DIFFERENCE ACHDUT - UNITY CAN MAKE. UNITY STARTS WITH U!

An old man called together his seven children.

One by one, the children each tried and successfully broke the stick.

HERE'S A STICK FOR EVERYONE. LET'S SEE, CAN YOU BREAK IT?



NOW LOOK AT THIS BUNDLE, CAN YOU BREAK THIS?

Again, they each took a turn to try and break the bundle but this time no-one was successful.



IT WAS EASY FOR ALL OF YOU TO BREAK A SINGLE STICK, BUT WHEN WE PUT THEM ALL TOGETHER, THEY WERE MUCH STRONGER. AS INDIVIDUALS WE ARE ALL WEAKER BUT WHEN WE STAND UNITED, WE ARE SO MUCH STRONGER.



UNITED WE STAND, DIVIDED WE FALL! SHAVUOT IS A TIME TO FOCUS ON ACHDUT - UNITY. HOW CAN YOU PUT UNITY INTO YOUR COMMUNITY?



Page Editor: Rabbi Nicky Goldwasser | Writer: Shira Chalk | Cartoonist: Paul Solomons



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