



CIRCLE TIME

AT YOUR
Shabbos Table

... FOR A Meaningful and Entertaining SHABBOS WITH YOUR CHILDREN ...

פרשת במדבר / שבועות

EXPANDED
EDITION

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TELL ME A TALE >>

A *dvar Torah* with a story.

JUST A LITTLE MOUNTAIN

בְּמִדְבַר סִינַי (א:א)

כָּל מִי שֶׁאֵינוֹ עוֹשֶׂה עֲצָמוֹ כַּמִּדְבָּר, הַפֶּקֶר, אֵינוֹ יָכוֹל לְקַנֹּת
אֶת הַחֲכָמָה וְהַתּוֹרָה (במדבר רבה א:ז)

In the Sinai desert... (1:1)

The Torah was given in the desert, to teach that anyone that does not make himself like the desert—unknown—cannot acquire wisdom and Torah. (Midrash Rabbah)

The parshah, and Shavuot, teach that Torah is given to those who hold themselves humble. This is symbolized by the fact that it was given in a desert, and on the smallest mountain. Here are several stories (for the many seudos of Shabbos and Yom Tov) about our gedolim holding themselves humbly “unknown.”

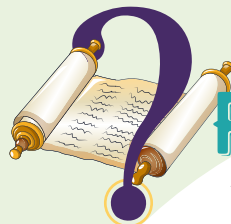
THE CHAZON ISH

Once, when the Chazon Ish was still a young man, he traveled to Minsk for Shabbos. His greatness was well known, but not his face; people talked about him but did not recognize him. Upon arriving in town on Friday, he went to the *beis midrash*, took a Gemara off the shelf, and began to learn.

Soon, some people entered to attend a *shiur*. The *shamash* rudely grabbed the Gemara from the Chazon Ish and said to the stranger, “The Gemaras are needed by the people attending the *shiur*. A simple Jew should say *Tehillim!*”

The next day, Shabbos, the same *shamash* approached the Chazon Ish and asked him for his name. As a guest in town, he would be receiving an *aliyah*.

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PARSHAH RIDDLES

Answers to this week's riddles appear on page 3.

PARSHAS BAMIDBAR

- 1 Which *nasi* in the *parshah* shares a name with a *nasi* in the times of *Chazal*?
- 2 Who in the *parshah* had the same name as a city? Who else had a city named after him?
- 3 Which three people does the Torah explicitly say had no sons? (Two are in this week's *parshah*.)
- 4 In which immediate family (father, mother and children) did five out of six people's names start with the same letter?

SHAVUOS: MEGILLAS RUS

- 5 What does *Ploni Almoni* mean? Which person was called that? Which place was called that?
- 6 Which three people in *Megillas Rus* are not wearing a shoe?
- 7 Who in *Megillas Rus* is called a *chayil*? Who else in *navi* is called by that term?
- 8 Which people from *Chumash* are mentioned in *Megillas Rus* (7)?



CHOLENT STORY

A story told in parts, designed to get children to come back to the table for the main course!

Recap: The men arrive at the market safely but realize they left the box of money in the forest.

Reb Yitzchak stared at his boss in shock. “Are you serious? We left all the money in the forest?”

“Yes,” Reb Shimon said calmly. “You remember, we took a nap and overslept, and I was in a rush to get out of the forest? (*Nice of him to blame himself*, Reb Yitzchak thought. *I was the one in a rush!*) In my haste, I forgot the box!”

“Quick! We must go back and look for it! Maybe it is still—”

Oddly, Reb Shimon didn’t seem too disturbed. “Relax, my friend,” he said. “The money is gone. Hashem gave it, and now He took it away.”

“Don’t you think we should at least go look for it? Try?”

“Nah, it’s gone. We left there weeks ago. Do you think a box of money survived in a forest for weeks? You said yourself that the forest is full of robbers. I’m sure they were only too happy to get some free money without having to steal it!”

Reb Yitzchak tried again. “Don’t you think we should at least...” but Reb Shimon wasn’t listening.

The two men returned to all the merchants with whom they had placed orders. “We’re sorry to have wasted your time,” they said, “but we will have to cancel our orders. We don’t have the funds for a deposit, after all. We hope to return at the next fair and continue our business relationship.”

Emptyhanded, the men set off for home. Their families had been counting on this trip to help them earn money so that they would not have to travel again for some time, but *hashgachah* had seen fit to make it all for nothing.

The trip back retraced their steps, and a week or so later, the men were passing through the forest in which they had left the box. “Look!” Reb Yitzchak said suddenly. “This is the place! I’m sure of it. This is where we left the box. Let’s stop and take a look. Maybe Hashem will help and we’ll get the box back!”

“No, my friend,” Reb Shimon said. “Let’s face reality. Gone is gone.”

“Don’t you think it’s *hishtadlus* to at least look? We’re passing right by the spot!”

“Oh, all right. Driver! Stop here for a moment, please.” The two men got out of the coach and approached the trees under which they had slept. To their shock, there was the ornate box that had contained the coins.

“Look! Look! There it is!” Reb Yitzchak could not contain his excitement.

“It’s probably empty.”

“Let’s find out!” Reb Yitzchak hurried over to the box and wrenched it open. Gold coins gleamed in the light. He reached inside, counting quickly. “Reb Shimon! You won’t believe it. It’s all here!” Reb Yitzchak put down the box and began to dance, hopping around with joy. “It’s a *nes!* A miracle! *Baruch Hashem...*”

Reb Yitzchak stopped dancing suddenly when he caught sight of Reb Shimon’s face. The other man was standing still, tears flowing silently down his cheeks.

TO BE CONTINUED...



HIGHLIGHTS FROM THE MIDRASH

אִישׁ עַל דְּגָלוֹ בְּאֵתֶת לְבֵית אֲבֹתָם יִחַנּוּ בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל (ב:ב)

Each man according to his flag with symbols according to the house of their fathers, Bnei Yisrael will camp. (2:2).

Why did Bnei Yisrael need flags, like the nations of the world?

- *Midrash Rabbah* (2:7) teaches that, actually, *the nations of the world took the idea of flags from Bnei Yisrael!* Each flag had a color and an image, and the nations adopted the concept.
- The *Shiltei Giborim* relates that the use of flags is one of many military strategies the world learned from Bnei Yisrael. He reports that Rome was initially a very weak country, fighting wars in a scattered, disorganized way. They later organized into battalions, troops, and squadrons, with many subdivisions and flags, and became a very powerful force. The idea came from Moshe’s division of Klal Yisrael in *Parshas Yisro* and this week’s *parshah*. *Shiltei Giborim* lists a number of other tactics the nations learned from us.
- But where did Bnei Yisrael get the idea to have flags? The midrash (2:3) relates that we had a strong desire for flags, and Hashem showed a special love for Klal Yisrael by giving them to us. We got the idea from none other than the *malachim* themselves! At *Mattan Torah* on Har Sinai, the *Shechinah* descended on the mountain, accompanied by 220,000 *malachei hashareis*. The *malachim* were organized into groups, each with its own flag! Some explain that this is one reason *Parshas Bamidbar* is always read right before Shavuot.
- The Shelah Hakadosh explains that the significance of the flags is to show that each *malach* has his own unique *kedushah* and mission. Our flags remind us that we too each have our own *kedushah* and mission.



PARSHAH RHYME



Review the main points of the parshah with younger children, while challenging your family to complete the rhymes (use the “grammen” tune). Answers on the side!

L

1. Moshe, Aharon, and the *nesi'im*
2. Counted all the people, except the _____.
3. Klal Yisrael camped in layers of rings,
4. In the middle was the Mishkan and its *heilige* _____.

L

5. *Machaneh Leviyah* could surely be found
6. Near the Mishkan, camped all _____.

H

7. *Yisra'elim* learning Torah, or deep in prayer,
8. They were living in the outermost _____.

Chorus

L

9. Shevet Yehudah is not one to brag
10. That they went first, carrying their _____.

L

11. Yissachar and Zevulun, who supported each other,
12. Walked together, behind Yehudah their _____.

H

13. Reuven carried the flag for the group on the right,
14. Followed by Shimon and Gad who won every _____.

Chorus

L

15. Tzaddikim from Yosef protected the back.
16. Efraim, Menashe and Binyamin blocked any _____.

L

17. Dan carried a flag when he went forth,
18. Leading the Shevatim who walked in the _____.

H

19. Asher and Naftali complete the nation,
20. This is how they all walked in _____.

Chorus

L

21. Shevet Levi was not counted among them,
22. They have a job, special for _____.

L

23. Their work was divided into three,
24. One each for Gershon, Kehas and _____.

H

25. Moshe told them each what their job was for
26. And swapped each one instead of a _____.

Answers: 2. *levi'im* 4. things 6. around 8. layer 10. flag 12. brother 14. fight 16. attack 18. north
20. formation 22. Hashem 24. Merari 26. *bechor*

RIDDLE ANSWERS:

1. Gamliel ben Pedahzur, *nasi* of Shevet Menashe, shares his name with the famous *nasi* of the second Beis Hamikdash era—Rabban Gamliel.
2. Kehas had a son named Chevron (see *Bamidbar* 3:19). Ya'ir ben Menashe named a city Chavos Ya'ir after himself (see *Bamidbar* 32:41).
3. צלפחד, נדב, אביהו
4. אהרן, אלישבע, אביהוא, אלעזר, איתמר
5. Ploni Almoni is an expression used to describe an unnamed person or place. The redeemer related to Naomi is called that. It is also used to describe an unnamed place in *Shmuel I* (21:3): וְאֵת הַנְּעָרִים יוֹדַעְתִּי אֶל מְקוֹם פְּלִנִי אֶלמוֹנִי.
6. When Naomi and Rus walked back to Eretz Yisrael, they did not have shoes (see the midrash to 1:7). Also, when Boaz and Ploni Almoni did a *kinyan*, a shoe was removed and exchanged.
7. Boaz is called *gibor chayil* (*Rus* 2:1) and Rus is called an *eishes chayil* (*Rus* 3:11). The term *gibor chayil* is also used for Yiftach (*Shoftim* 11:1), Kish the father of Shaul (*Shmuel I* 9:1), Yeravam ben Nevat, the first king of *Malchus Yisrael* (*Melachim I* 11:28), and Na'amán the general of Aram (*Melachim II* 5:1). *Eishes chayil* is used in *Mishlei* 12:4 and 31:10.
8. Rochel, Leah, and Tamar (see *Rus* 4:11-12); Peretz, Chetzron, Nachshon, and Aminadav (*Rus* 4:18-20). [Yehudah, Yisrael, and Moav are also mentioned but not in reference to individual people.]

You may be surprised to find something familiar in every haftorah.

HAFTORAH: YOU KNOW NAVI

HAFTORAH SUMMARY

This week's haftorah comes from *Hoshe'a*. The *navi* begins by blessing the Jewish people, saying they will become too numerous to count. He then blasts the people for their faithlessness to Hashem, comparing them to a disloyal wife. The *navi* tells about terrible punishments and threatens to leave Yisrael in the *Midbar*. He concludes by promising *Geulah* and a renewed loving bond between Hashem and the people. The marriage begun at Har Sinai will be fresh again.

CONNECTION TO THE PARSHAH

The *parshah* recounts Hashem's love for the Jewish people expressed through counting them and describes our travels in the *Midbar*. The haftorah also begins with blessings and love expressed through Bnei Yisrael becoming "too numerous to count," and refers to a threat to banish Klal Yisrael to the *Midbar* again. It also leads us right to Shavuot, telling us about a renewed bond, like the one created on Shavuot so many years ago.

YOU KNOW NAVI

The haftorah contains the famous and beautiful prayer:

וְאַרְשִׁיתִי לִי לְעוֹלָם וְאַרְשִׁיתִי לִי בְּצֶדֶק
וּבְמִשְׁפָּט וּבְחֶסֶד וּבְרַחֲמִים וְאַרְשִׁיתִי לִי
בְּאַמּוֹנָה וּבְיָדְעֵת אֶת ה'

>> CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

Upon hearing "Avraham Yeshayah ben Shmaryahu Yosef," he understood that the man he had insulted was none other than the great *talmid chacham* everyone was talking about! The *shamash* turned red and begged forgiveness.

"What's the problem?" the Chazon Ish said mildly. "Everything you said was true. The Gemaros are needed by the people in the *shiur*. And every Jew should say *Tehillim!*"

RAV YOSEF KOVO

The head of all the *mekubalim* in Yerushalayim about a hundred years ago was Rav Yosef Kovo. He taught in the Kabbalah yeshivah called Bes Keil, and everyone knew him as Harav Hachassid.

The baker's wife woke up one morning after the bakery was already open and running and noticed that the dough had been left to rise on the windowsill. It had been there for too long and if it was not taken in, it would sour. She wanted to tell the maid to take it away, but she was still wearing her robe and couldn't go into the street. Instead of getting dressed, she stood behind the door of her *chatzer* (courtyard) and waited until she heard footsteps in the street.

Sure enough, someone soon came by. "Is that a Jew?" she called out from behind the door.

"Yes," came a man's voice.

"Please, *gitte Yid* (good Jew), will you go tell the maid in the bakery to take in the dough? It's about to spoil."

"Absolutely, right away!" The baker's wife could hear the man's footsteps hurrying away.

A few minutes later, the maid burst into the *chatzer*, her face white. "Do you know whom you sent with a message about the dough?" she gasped. "That was Harav Hachassid!"

The baker and his wife rushed to the yeshivah to apologize to the *gadol* for sending him on a child's mission.

Rav Yosef Kovo couldn't understand

why they were so upset. "First of all, you called me a 'good Jew,' which is a great *brachah*. Second, you couldn't see through the door. Third, you gave me an opportunity to do *chessed*, what could be better?"

RAV MOSHE FEINSTEIN

A man new to Torah life heard all about the great Rabbi Feinstein and wanted to see him. He visited Mesivta Tiferes Yerushalayim for Shacharis one morning. Reb Moshe saw him enter the *beis midrash* and hurried over, his hand extended in greeting. The man did not know who Reb Moshe was, and he mistook the open hand for a beggar's plea! He pressed a quarter into Reb Moshe's hand.

Not wanting to embarrass the man, Reb Moshe thanked him for his generosity, took the coin, and walked away.

Another time, a man called to his son from the window of his car. "Moishele!" he shouted. Reb Moshe Feinstein was walking nearby and he assumed the man was talking to him. He hurried over to the open car window and said, "Yes?"

RAV BEINUSH FINKEL

New *talmidim* of Mir Yeshivah didn't always know whom the *rosh yeshivah* was, but they did know that they had to get out of the *beis midrash* before he arrived to say *shiur klali*, because the *shiur* was hard to follow.

Once, as he was arriving to say *shiur*, Rav Beinush beheld some new *talmidim* running down the steps of the *beis midrash*. "Run quickly," he told them. "Rav Beinush is almost here!"

At his shivah, many strangers arrived and asked to see a picture of the *rosh yeshivah*. They related that Rav Beinush, who had walked to the Kosel for *neitz* every morning, had always stopped to shmooze with them and uplift them along the way, but they never knew who he was—until he was *niftar*.



HALACHAH

Counting Jews

Is it assur to count Jewish people? If so, what is the source? What is the reason?

The Torah records that Hashem told Moshe to count the people with coins (as opposed to directly) “so that there wouldn’t be a plague.” Shaul Hamelech counted them through sheep. In the Beis Hamikdash, *kohanim* were counted indirectly. The Gemara in *Brachos* says that even schoolchildren know that it is *assur* to count people, but the Gemara doesn’t give a source for it. In *Yoma*, the Gemara lists several hints to the *issur*. Rabbeinu Bacheye explains that it is *assur* to count people because by doing so, one singles people out of a group, subjecting them to individual judgment.

Didn’t Dovid Hamelech count Klal Yisrael?

Dovid Hamelech did count Klal Yisrael, and as a result, a plague struck them. When Dovid ordered Yoav to carry out the count, Yoav warned Dovid against it, but Dovid didn’t agree. Why did Dovid think it was permitted? The *sefer Be’er Sheva* learns from the Gemara that Hashem hid the correct halachah from him. But some *Rishonim* learn a number of *halachos* about counting from the story of Dovid’s count.

Can we count indirectly?

If indirect counting is allowed, why didn’t

Yoav do the count indirectly? The Ramban explains that Dovid’s count was not for any constructive purpose. A count without a good reason is *assur*, even if it’s done indirectly. Many *poskim* bring this *l’halachah*. An example of a good reason could be for war, or to make sure everyone is there. Dovid did it just to feel proud of the number of people over which he ruled.

What about approximate counts?

The Chasam Sofer explains that the *heter* to count indirectly is based on the fact that indirect counting will always involve mistakes, and the final number will be off by a bit. As such, any approximate count is *muttar*, and any exact count, even done indirectly, is *assur*.

Can we count part of the people?

Another explanation given by the Ramban is that counting indirectly does not make it *muttar* to count *all* of Klal Yisrael, only smaller groups (when building the Mishkan, Moshe used coins to count people aged 20-60 only).

Can you count people who are not present?

Pe’as Hashulchan writes, based on a mishnah in Shabbos, that it is permitted to count the names of people when they are not there,

such as adding up a guest list for a wedding.

Would it be permitted to take a census of Israeli citizens?

The *Seridei Aish* writes that a national census is considered a valid purpose. He also says that counting forms or names on a paper qualifies as indirect. Rav Chaim Kanievsky disagreed on both issues and forbade the Israeli census, if done by humans. Census by computer may be permissible.

How can we count people for a minyan?

It is customary to count people to see if a *minyan* is present by using a ten-word *pasuk*. (This may run into a problem of reciting *Torah shebichsav* orally.) The *Kaf Hachaim* allows one to count in his head, without speaking. There is a source that counting in bunches, such as groups of 2, 3, or 4, may be permitted. *Magen Avraham* permits counting noses, or some other body part that is non-essential for life (do not count heads!). It is permissible to say the total number of people present (as is done clearly in the *parshah*). I am not aware of a source that permits counting by saying “not one, not two...”

THE LAST WORD

A one-liner worth remembering

“THE KEY TO REACHING GREATNESS IS TO USE THE MINUTES OTHERS ALLOW TO GO TO WASTE.”

– Chasam Sofer



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