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מָה בַּפָּרָשָׁה • In This Week's Parashah

- If בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל (Benei Yisrael, the Israelites) follow God's laws, they will experience many blessings. They will enjoy rain at the right time, healthy crops, safety, and peace. God will live among them.
- If they do not follow God's laws, they will be punished. Their land will stop producing food. Enemy armies will take over, and Benei Yisrael will be scattered among the nations.
- God will remember the promises to our ancestors, and God will never punish the people too much.
- Sefer Vayikra closes with a discussion of donations to the מִשְׁכָּן (Mishkan, sanctuary for God in the wilderness). A person could donate an amount of silver according to a list of amounts recorded in the Torah.
- One tenth (also called a "tithe") of your harvest and newborn animals should go to God. This is מַעֲשֵׂר (ma'aser).



מִדְרָשׁ • Midrash

Bzzzz
A lot of midrashim are **bugged** by something unusual in the Torah text

ויקרא כו:ג

אִם בְּחֻקֹּתַי תֵּלֵכוּ וְאֶת מִצְוֹתַי תִּשְׁמְרוּ
וַעֲשִׂיתֶם אֹתָם:

Vayikra 26:3

If you walk in My laws, and keep My mitzvot, and do them...

This pasuk seems repetitive. What do we learn from its different parts?



ספרא בחקתי פרשה א:ב

"אִם בְּחֻקֹּתַי תֵּלֵכוּ"—יָכוֹל אֵלּוּ הַמִּצְוֹת?
כְּשֶׁהוּא אוֹמֵר "וְאֶת מִצְוֹתַי תִּשְׁמְרוּ
וַעֲשִׂיתֶם אֹתָם," הֲרֵי מִצְוֹת אֲמוּרוֹת.

הָא מָה אֲנִי מְקַיֵּם "אִם בְּחֻקֹּתַי תֵּלֵכוּ"?
לִהְיוֹת עֲמֵלִים
בַּתּוֹרָה.

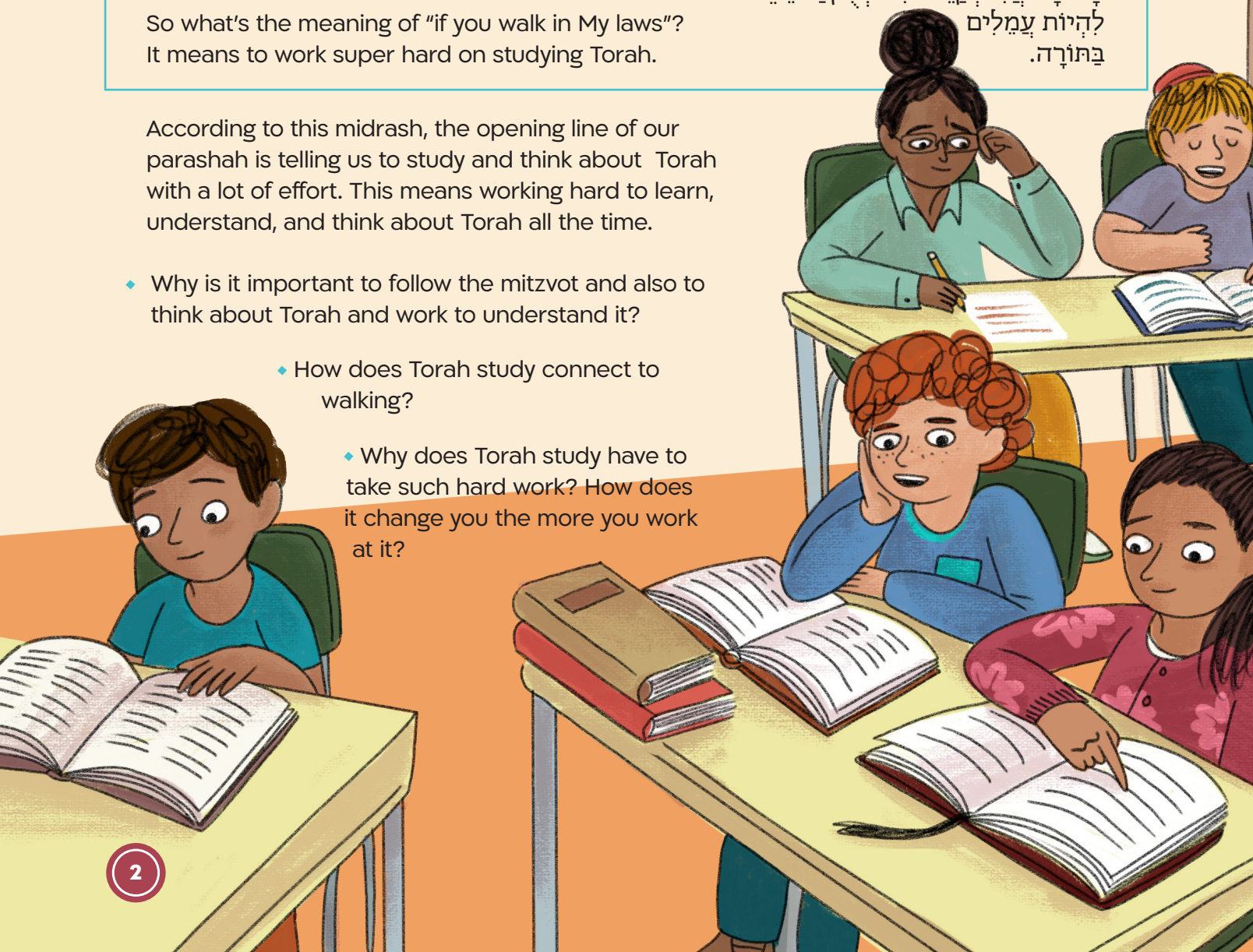
Sifra (Eretz Yisrael, 1700 years ago)

"If you walk in My laws"—Could this be talking about the mitzvot? But the pasuk also says, "and keep My mitzvot, and do them"—that part is talking about mitzvot already!

So what's the meaning of "if you walk in My laws"? It means to work super hard on studying Torah.

According to this midrash, the opening line of our parashah is telling us to study and think about Torah with a lot of effort. This means working hard to learn, understand, and think about Torah all the time.

- Why is it important to follow the mitzvot and also to think about Torah and work to understand it?
- How does Torah study connect to walking?
- Why does Torah study have to take such hard work? How does it change you the more you work at it?



The Talmud suggests one nice outcome from all that hard work:

Talmud Bavli Sanhedrin 99b

Rav Yitzhak bar Avudimi said: What does the pasuk mean, "The spirit of a laborer labors for them..." (Mishlei 16:26)? You labor for Torah, and the Torah you worked hard to learn labors for you.

תלמוד בבלי סנהדרין דף צט עמוד ב

אָמַר רַב יִצְחָק בַּר אֲבוּדִימִי מַאי קְרָא שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר "נֶפֶשׁ עָמֵל עָמְלָה לּוֹ..." (משלי טז:כו)? הוּא עָמֵל בְּמָקוֹם זֶה וְתוֹרָתוֹ עוֹמֶלֶת לוֹ בְּמָקוֹם אַחֵר.



Rashi (1,000 years ago) thinks this means that the more you work on knowing and understanding Torah, the more Torah itself tries to help you out, even asking God to make it easier and more enjoyable for you to learn!

- When have you worked really hard at something until it finally made sense? How did that feel? Have you had the experience of something getting easier and easier for you the more you learned it?

The next line in the Talmud takes this a step further. Laboring for Torah is actually the reason we were created:

אָמַר רַבִּי אֶלְעָזָר כָּל אָדָם לְעָמָל נִבְרָא שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר "כִּי אָדָם לְעָמָל יוּלָּד" (איוב ה:ז)...

בְּשֶׁהוּא אוֹמֵר "לֹא יָמוּשׁ סֵפֶר הַתּוֹרָה הַזֶּה מִפִּיךָ" (יהושע א:ח), הֱוֵי אוֹמֵר לְעָמָל תּוֹרָה נִבְרָא.

R. Elazar said: Every person was created to labor, as it says, "For people were born for labor" (Iyyov 5:7)...

And when it says, "Do not let this Torah leave your mouth" (Yehoshua 1:8), it must be that the labor we were created for is Torah.

- Why would working hard for Torah be the whole purpose of being created? What does that tell us about how we should live our lives?
- **Try it out!** Set aside some time to learn Torah every day. See how it feels after a day, a week, and a month. Does it become more meaningful? Does it get easier?

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פֵּרוּשִׁים • Commentary

The rare word קֶרִי (keri) appears seven times in perek 26! Here are two:

Vayikra 26:40-41

They (Benei Yisrael) will admit that they and their ancestors did wrong, in that they wronged Me (God), and went with Me **in keri**.

And even I (God) will go with them **in keri**...

ויקרא כו:מ-מא

וְהִתְוַדּוּ אֶת עֲוֹנָם וְאֶת עֲוֹן אֲבֹתָם
בְּמַעֲלָם אֲשֶׁר מָעֲלוּ בִי וְאַף אֲשֶׁר
הָלְכוּ עִמִּי **בְּקֶרִי**:

אַף אֲנִי אֵלֵךְ עִמָּם **בְּקֶרִי**...

It's clear that "keri" is something bad. But what exactly does it mean here?

Rashi (France, 1,000 years ago)

1. Our Rabbis said this word means "temporary" or בְּמִקְרֶה (be-mikreh, by chance). It's something that happens only sometimes, meaning that Benei Yisrael will follow the mitzvot only sometimes.
2. Menahem explained that it's an expression for "holding back," like the word הֹקַר (hokar, hold back) in Mishlei 25:17... meaning stubbornness; Benei Yisrael will harden their hearts to stop themselves from getting close to God.

רש"י

1. רַבּוֹתֵינוּ אָמְרוּ עֲרַאי, בְּמִקְרֶה, שֶׁאֵינוֹ אֶלָּא לִפְרָקִים, בֵּין תֵּלְכוּ עֲרַאי בְּמִצְוֹות.

2. וּמְנַחֵם פֵּרֵשׁ לְשׁוֹן מְנִיעָה, וְכֵן "הֹקַר רַגְלְךָ" (משלי כה)... לְשׁוֹן קְשִׁי, שֶׁמַּקְשִׁין לִבָּם לְמָנַע מֵהִתְקָרֵב אֵלַי.

According to Rashi's first explanation, "keri" means that Benei Yisrael act without full commitment to mitzvot. They'll do mitzvot here and there, but mitzvot won't be a permanent part of their lives.

- Why is it so important to do mitzvot regularly and with full commitment? How does that change the way we experience the mitzvot in our lives?
- How can that change the way we experience God in our lives?



דַּקָּה שֶׁל דִּיוּן • One-Minute Debate

Debate: If you have to give someone bad news, do it quickly.



The תּוֹכֵחָה (tokhehah, rebuke) contains some really awful punishments that Benei Yisrael could suffer. During Torah reading, it's customary to read this section softly and quickly.

How to play:

- Here are some arguments to get you started, but try to come up with your own. Then debate someone!
- For a true one-minute debate, give each side 30 seconds to make its best case.



Agree!

- There's no point in prolonging the pain. Just rip off the bandaid and get it over with.
- It's most sensitive to just get to the point.



Disagree!

- If you say the bad news too fast, you might not be understood.
- Hearing too much bad news all at once is overwhelming. It's better to hear it in smaller pieces.

Rashi also quotes Menahem ben Saruk (Spain, 1,100 years ago), who suggests that "keri" means preventing yourself from being close to God on purpose.



- Why might a person hold back from doing mitzvot or from connecting with God? How can being more open-minded or flexible prevent that from happening?
- What are things we might do that prevent us from feeling close to God? What are things we might do to feel closer?
- Can you find all seven appearances of "keri" in our perek? Which explanation of "keri" do you think fits best in each appearance? Could both interpretations be right?



aliyot:
1) Vayikra 26:3 to 26:5
2) 26:6 to 26:9
3) 26:10 to 26:46
4) 27:1 to 27:15
5) 27:16 to 27:21
6) 27:22 to 27:28
7) 27:29 to 27:34

haftarah: Yirmeyahu 16:19 to 17:14

שְׁאֵלוֹת הַשָּׁבוּעַ • Parashah Scavenger Hunt

The answers to the first seven questions can be found in the matching numbered aliyah in the Torah reading. The answers to questions 8 and 9 are harder and can come from anywhere in the parashah. The answer to question 10 is in this week's haftarah.

Good luck!



1. How many pesukim are in this aliyah? (Hint: It's the shortest an aliyah can be!)
2. What's weird about the math involving enemies in this aliyah?
3. What will God not smell?
4. What happens if you dedicate an animal as a sacrifice and then try to switch it out with another one?
5. When you dedicate your family field to the בֵּית הַמִּקְדָּשׁ (Beit HaMikdash, Temple in Jerusalem), it has a fixed value in silver, for every חֹמֶר (homer, about 50 gallons) of barley seed you can plant in it. What is that amount of silver?
6. What type of animal can't be dedicated as money to God?
7. What goes under a staff?
8. Where does all of Sefer Vayikra take place?



9. Someone's name is spelled in an unusual way in our parashah. Whose name, and what is the spelling?
10. **From the haftarah:** Which pasuk is familiar from the weekday עֲמִידָה (Amidah) prayer?

* Look for the answers on page 8!

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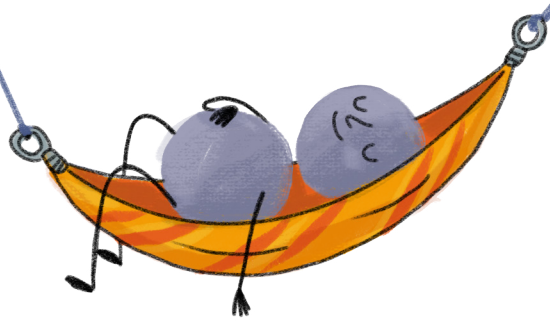


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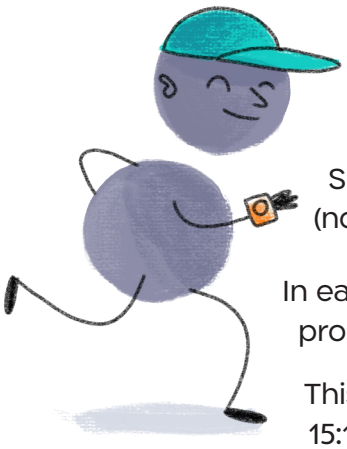
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דִּקְדּוּק • Grammar



Here's the final rule for distinguishing between a שְׁוָא נָח (sheva nah, resting sheva) and a שְׁוָא נָע (sheva na, moving sheva)—the two dots under a letter that you are supposed to pronounce. This one is super easy: **Whenever there is a sheva under a letter with a דָּגֵשׁ (dagesh, dot), it is a sheva na** and you should let people know by pronouncing its sound! Here are some examples from our parashah:



כַּנְּחָשָׁה	מִפְּנֵי	אִתְּכֶם	שַׁבְּתֹתֶיהָ
kannehushah (not kanhushah)	mippenei (not mipnei)	ittekhem (not itkhem)	Shabbetotehah (not shabtotehah)

In each case, the bolded letter has a dagesh, and that means you pronounce the sheva underneath it.

This can really make a difference to the meaning. In Shemot 15:16, the Torah says that God's enemies יִדְּמוּ (yiddemu), which means they will be silent as a stone. If you don't pay attention to the dot in the dalet, you might say יִדְמוּ (yidmu), will means those enemies will be similar to a stone. That's the difference between being quiet and being heavy!

Congratulations, in the last four weeks you have learned four rules for finding a sheva na. Here's a cool mnemonic to help you remember them all:



Aleph is the first letter of the alphabet: When a sheva is on the first letter of a word, it's a sheva na.



Bet is the second letter in the alphabet: When you have two shevas in the middle of a word, the second one is a sheva na.



Gimmel stands for תְּנוּעָה גְּדוֹלָה (tenu'ah gedolah, long vowel): When a sheva follows a long vowel, it's a sheva na.



Dalet stands for דָּגֵשׁ (dagesh), a dot found in many letters: When a sheva appears under a letter with a dagesh, it's a sheva na.



You are ready to be a sheva sleuth! Good luck finding, listening, and pronouncing!

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מִדְרָשׁ • Midrash



On pages 2–3 we considered the meaning of the opening words in our parashah: אִם בְּחֻקֹּתַי תֵּלֵכוּ (If you walk in My laws).

How do you walk in God's laws? A midrash connects these words to a place in Tanakh where King David describes walking to God.

Vayikra Rabbah

"If you walk in My laws" (Vayikra 26:3)—this is connected to what is written: "I have thought about my paths, and returned my feet to Your decrees" (Tehillim 119:59).

David said: 'Master of the Universe, every day I would plan my route and say: I am going to this place or to that home. But then my feet would bring me to a beit knesset (shul) or a beit midrash (study hall).'

According to this midrash, whenever King David laced up his sneakers and tried to walk anywhere, his feet would take him to a holy place!

ויקרא רבה

"אִם בְּחֻקֹּתַי תֵּלֵכוּ" (ויקרא כו:ג)—הַדָּא הוּא דִכְתִיב: "חִשַּׁבְתִּי דְרָכָי וָאָשִׁיבָה רַגְלַי אֶל עֵדֹתֶיךָ" (תהלים קיט:נט).

אָמַר דָּוִד רִבּוֹנוֹ שֶׁל עוֹלָם בְּכָל יוֹם וָיוֹם הָיִיתִי מְחַשֵּׁב וְאוֹמֵר לְמָקוֹם פְּלוֹנִי וּלְבֵית דִּירָה פְּלוֹנִית אֲנִי הוֹלֵךְ, וְהָיוּ רַגְלַי מְבִיאוֹת אוֹתִי לְבָתֵּי כְנֵסִיּוֹת וּלְבָתֵּי מִדְרָשׁוֹת.

- What does it mean to be naturally pulled to holy places or to the Torah?
- Do you ever feel an inclination inside you, guiding you to be better? How can we listen to that voice?

The Sefat Emet (150 years ago) gives a different explanation of the midrash. He says that King David didn't really wind up in a beit knesset or beit midrash every time he headed out for a walk. Actually King David's feet took him to all sorts of different places, but he was always able to find something holy to do in those places.

- What would it mean to turn every place that you go into a beit midrash?
- Try it out! Can you find something holy to do wherever you go?

Parashah Scavenger Hunt Answers:

1. Three
2. Five people chase 100 enemies (20 each), but 100 people chase 10,000 enemies (100 each)! (26:8)
3. The pleasant smells of Benei Yisrael's קָרְבָּנוֹת (korbanot, sacrifices) (26:31)
4. They are both holy, and you must offer both of them! (27:10)
5. 50 shekels (27:16)
6. A firstborn—it already belongs to God! (27:26)
7. All the cattle as it's being counted for מַעֲשֵׂר (ma'aser, one tenth being donated to God) (27:32)
8. הַר סִינַי (Har Sinai, Mount Sinai) (27:34, and check back to 7:38)
9. יַעֲקֹב—Normally it's spelled יַעֲקֹב—without a vav (26:42)
10. Yirmeyahu 17:14 is almost the same as the opening line of the רְפָאֵנוּ (refa'einu) section in the Amidah, which is about healing. In Yirmeyahu the language is singular ("I" and "me"), but in the Amidah it's plural ("us" and "we").