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# בְּמִדְבַּר Bemidbar

Because learning Torah is sweet

DeVAsH


ב״ג — ב״ט אִיָּר תשפ״ו

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## מָה בַּפָּרָשָׁה • In This Week's Parashah

- Benei Yisrael get organized for their journey through the מִדְבָּר (midbar, wilderness).
- Moshe takes a census. He gets help from one representative of each שֵׁבֶט (shevet, tribe). The total number in the count is 603,550.
- This number did not include the שֵׁבֶט (shevet, tribe) of Levi, who were counted separately. Shevet Levi, which included the כֹּהֲנִים (kohanim, priests), were responsible for the Mishkan and its כֵּלִים (keilim, vessels). When Benei Yisrael traveled, it was the לְוִיִּם (Levi'im) that took apart the Mishkan and carried it.
- When Benei Yisrael camped in the midbar, they followed a precise formation.
  - The Mishkan was in the center.
  - Shevet Levi camped closest to the Mishkan, all around it. The other twelve tribes were divided into four groups of three.
  - These four groups were arranged in a square, going around the Levi camp in all directions.
- Moshe counts the firstborns of Benei Yisrael. God explains that firstborns were originally dedicated for special work in the Mishkan, but that Shevet Levi should take their place.





## פְּשַׁט הַפְּסוּקִים • Understanding the Verses

The Levi'im had special roles taking care of the mishkan. The Torah explains how this came to be.

| **Bemidbar 3:12-13** | **במדבר ג:יב-יג** |
|---|---|
| I (God) took the Levi'im<br>from among Benei Yisrael,<br>in place of all the firstborns<br>among Benei Yisrael.<br>The Levi'im shall be Mine. | וַאֲנִי הִנֵּה לָקַחְתִּי אֶת הַלְוִיִּם<br>מִתּוֹךְ בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל<br>תַּחַת כָּל בְּכוֹר פֶּטֶר רֶחֶם<br>מִבְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל<br>וְהָיוּ לִי הַלְוִיִּם: |
| For every firstborn is Mine.<br>From the day that I struck every firstborn in<br>Mitzrayim (Egypt) I made every firstborn of<br>Israel—from human to animal—holy to Me.<br>They shall be Mine, I am God. | כִּי לִי כָּל בְּכוֹר<br>בְּיוֹם הַכֹּתִי כָל בְּכוֹר בְּאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם<br>הִקְדַּשְׁתִּי לִי כָל בְּכוֹר בְּיִשְׂרָאֵל<br>מֵאָדָם עַד בְּהֵמָה<br>לִי יִהְיוּ אֲנִי ה': |

- What do you notice? What are you wondering about?
- What words get repeated in these pesukim? What can we learn from these words?
- Why does it make sense for Benei Yisrael's firstborns to be considered holy to God? How do you understand the connection to מַכַּת בְּכוֹרוֹת (makkat bekhorot, the final plague when the Egyptian firstborns were killed)?
- Why is it "holy" to have special roles in the mishkan? What do the mishkan and holiness have to do with each other?
- What do you think it would have been like for firstborns to be the ones to work in the mishkan? What would have been nice about that?
- According to a midrash (Bemidbar Rabbah 1:6), the Levi'im were promoted because they weren't part of חֵטְא הָעֵגֶל (heit ha-eigel, the sin of the golden calf), and the firstborns were. You can find evidence for this position in Devarim 10:8. Look it up! Why would not taking part in heit ha-eigel make the Levi'im a better choice for working in the mishkan?



## מִדְרָשׁ • Midrash




Why does the Torah stress that it was given in the מִדְבָּר (midbar, wilderness)? What can we learn from this?

Here are two midrashim that notice how important the midbar seems to be.

### Mekhilta de-Rabbi Yishmael Ba-Hodesh 1

The Torah was given publicly and in an ownerless place.

If the Torah had been given in Eretz Yisrael, people could say, "The nations of the world have no share in it."

That's why it was given in the midbar, publicly and in an ownerless place. So that anyone who wants to come and accept the Torah can come and accept it!

### מכילתא מסכתא דבחדש א

נִתְּנָה תּוֹרָה בְּדִימוֹס בַּר חֲסָיָא בְּמָקוֹם הֶפְקֵר.

שֶׁאִלּוּ נִתְּנָה בְּאֶרֶץ יִשְׂרָאֵל, הָיוּ אוֹמְרִים:
"לְאֻמּוֹת הָעוֹלָם אֵין לָהֶם חֵלֶק בָּהּ."

לְפִיכָךְ נִתְּנָה בַּמִּדְבָּר,
בְּדִימוֹס בַּר חֲסָיָא בְּמָקוֹם הֶפְקֵר,
וְכָל הָרוֹצֶה לְקַבֵּל, יָבֹא וִיקַבֵּל!

This midrash suggests that, because the Torah comes from the midbar, we know that it can be for everyone–people who are Jewish and people who are not.

- When the midrash suggests that everyone can come accept the Torah, what does that mean? What are they accepting to do?
- The midrash seems to think that Benei Yisrael have to share the Torah with anyone who wants to accept it. What does that mean? How can you share the Torah with others?

A second midrash explains the importance of the midbar in a different way.

### Talmud Bavli Eruvin 54a

R. Matna said: ...If you allow yourself to be treated as a midbar, where anyone can step — your learning will stick with you. If you don't — it won't.

### תלמוד בבלי מסכת ערובין דף נד עמוד א

אָמַר רַב מַתְנָה: ...אִם מֵשִׂים אָדָם עַצְמוֹ כְּמִדְבָּר
זֶה שֶׁהַכֹּל דָּשִׁין בּוֹ – תַּלְמוּדוֹ מִתְקַיֵּים בְּיָדוֹ.
וְאִם לָאו – אֵין תַּלְמוּדוֹ מִתְקַיֵּים בְּיָדוֹ.

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- R. Matna thinks the midbar represents the value of being humble. Why is it important to have humility in order to be good at learning new things?
- Why is it important to have humility in order to learn Torah specifically?
- These two midrashim highlighted two different aspects of the midbar. Can you think of other explanations for why the Torah was given in the midbar?




## פֵּרוּשִׁים • Commentary

Aharon and his sons are told to supervise the members of the Kehat family and make sure they all knew exactly what their jobs were:

**Bemidbar 4:18-19**

Don't let the Kehat family be cut off from the Levi'im.

Do this for them, so they may live and not die when they approach the most holy things:
Aharon and his sons should go in and assign each of them to their work and what they should carry.

**במדבר ד:יח-יט**

אַל תַּכְרִיתוּ אֶת שֵׁבֶט מִשְׁפְּחֹת הַקְּהָתִי מִתּוֹךְ הַלְוִיִּם:

וְזֹאת עֲשׂוּ לָהֶם וְחָיוּ וְלֹא יָמֻתוּ בְּגִשְׁתָּם אֶת קֹדֶשׁ הַקָּדָשִׁים אַהֲרֹן וּבָנָיו יָבֹאוּ וְשָׂמוּ אוֹתָם אִישׁ אִישׁ עַל עֲבֹדָתוֹ וְאֶל מַשָּׂאוֹ:

It sounds like the supervision was meant to prevent the Kehat family from being "cut off," or dying. **But why was the Kehat family in danger?**

A midrash presents two views.

## Bemidbar Rabbah 5:1

R. Elazar ben Pedat said in the name of R. Yosei ben Zimra: Fire would come out and burn the people carrying the aron, and some of them would die. So they would all run to grab the shulhan (table) and menorah and mizbehot (altars), and they would run away from the aron because they thought it might harm them. This was like "offending" the aron, and it made God angry at them, and then even **more** of them would die.

So the Holy Blessed One said to Moshe and Aharon: Make this precaution for Kehat so they don't get cut off from the world... Have Aharon and his sons come, "and assign each of them to their work and what they should carry" (Bemidbar 4:19) – so that they couldn't swap jobs and burdens.

## במדבר רבה ה:א

אָמַר רַבִּי אֶלְעָזָר בֶּן פְּדָת בְּשֵׁם רַבִּי יוֹסֵי בֶּן זִמְרָא מִתּוֹךְ שֶׁהָיְתָה הָאֵשׁ יוֹצֵאת וְשָׂפָה בְּטוֹעֲנֵי הָאָרוֹן הָיוּ מִתְמַעֲטִין. וְהָיוּ כָּל אֶחָד וְאֶחָד רָצִין, זֶה נוֹטֵל אֶת הַשֻּׁלְחָן וְזֶה נוֹטֵל אֶת הַמְּנוֹרָה וְזֶה נוֹטֵל אֶת הַמִּזְבְּחוֹת, וּבוֹרְחִים מִן הָאָרוֹן מִפְּנֵי שֶׁהָיָה מַזִּיקָן. וְהָיָה הָאָרוֹן כְּאִלּוּ מִתְבַּזֶּה, וְהָיָה הַקָּדוֹשׁ בָּרוּךְ הוּא כּוֹעֵס עֲלֵיהֶם וְשׁוּב הָיוּ מִתְכַּלִּין.

אָמַר לָהֶם הַקָּדוֹשׁ בָּרוּךְ הוּא לְמֹשֶׁה וּלְאַהֲרֹן עֲשׂוּ לָהֶם תַּקָּנָה לִבְנֵי קְהָת כְּדֵי שֶׁלֹּא יִכָּרְתוּ מִן הָעוֹלָם...אֶלָּא יָבוֹא אַהֲרֹן וּבָנָיו "וְשָׂמוּ אוֹתָם אִישׁ אִישׁ עַל עֲבֹדָתוֹ וְאֶל מַשָּׂאוֹ" (במדבר ד:יט) – כְּדֵי שֶׁלֹּא יוּכְלוּ לְהִתְחַלֵּף מֵעֲבוֹדָה לַעֲבוֹדָה וּמִמַּשָּׂא לְמַשָּׂא.

According to R. Elazar ben Pedat, carrying the aron was a dangerous job, but running away from it was even more dangerous. God did not want the Kehat family to be completely wiped out, so Aharon was told to make sure people knew their assignments and were not allowed to switch. That way, they couldn't shirk their responsibilities and run away from the aron.



R. Shmuel has an opposite view:

R. Shmuel bar Nahman said: ...the problem was actually that they all knew that whoever carried the aron would get the biggest reward. So they would avoid the shulhan and menorah and mizbehot and all run to the aron, in order to collect reward.

רַבִּי שְׁמוּאֵל בַּר נַחְמָן אָמַר... אֶלָּא מִפְּנֵי שֶׁהָיוּ יוֹדְעִין שֶׁכָּל מִי שֶׁטּוֹעֵן בָּאָרוֹן שְׂכָרוֹ מְרֻבֶּה וְהָיוּ מַנִּיחִין אֶת הַשֻּׁלְחָן וְהַמְּנוֹרָה וְהַמִּזְבְּחוֹת וְכֻלָּן רָצִין לָאָרוֹן לִטֹּל שָׂכָר.



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- How are these two explanations similar? How are they different?
- What are jobs you have that you would never want to avoid? What are jobs that you'd be happy to skip?
- Why is it so important to keep responsibilities, especially when they're the ones we least want to do?
- What do you think R. Elazar and R. Shmuel want us to learn about doing jobs that are hard, or jobs that don't get much recognition?







## דָּבָר שֶׁל עִבְרִית • A Moment of Hebrew

**Bemidbar 3:46**

And for the redemption price of the 273 firstborns of Benei Yisrael, that were **over and above** the number of Levi'im...

**במדבר ג:מו**

וְאֵת פִּדוּיֵי הַשְּׁלֹשָׁה וְהַשִּׁבְעִים
וְהַמָּאתָיִם **הָעֹדְפִים** עַל הַלְוִיִּם
מִבְּכוֹר בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל׃

**עֹדֶף (שֹׁרֶשׁ ע.ד.פ)**

- Change
- Extra or surplus (odef)

חֲנוּת עֲדָפִים =
Outlet store (hanut odafim)




סֵדֶר עֲדִיפוּיוֹת =
Priorities (seder adifuyot)

מַעֲדִיף/מַעֲדִיפָה =
Prefer (ma'adif/ma'adifah)

### Find the Word!

When Benei Yisrael get instructions about מָן (mann, miraculous food) in the wilderness, they are told to leave some aside on Friday, for Shabbat. Can you find the word that contains this שֹׁרֶשׁ (shoresh, root) to describe leftover mann? (Hint: Look in Shemot 16:23.)

**aliyot:**
**1)** Bemidbar 1:1 to 1:19
**2)** 1:20 to 1:54
**3)** 2:1 to 2:34
**4)** 3:1 to 3:13
**5)** 3:14 to 3:39
**6)** 3:40 to 3:51
**7)** 4:1 to 4:20

**haftarah:** Shmuel Alef 20:18-42 (Mahar Hodesh)

# 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. Where did the census happen?
2. Which were the two largest שְׁבָטִים (shevatim, tribes)?
3. Which tribes camped on the northern side?
4. Who receives someone else's role?
5. Which family was in charge of the mishkan's bars, pillars, sockets, and vessels?
6. How many extra firstborns were there?



7. Which of the mishkan's כֵּלִים (keilim, vessels) was covered with a cloth the color of אַרְגָּמָן (argaman, purple)?
8. Who shares a name with Moshe's father-in-law?
9. When you try to add up the three families that made up the tribe of Levi, there is an addition problem. What is it?
10. **From the haftarah:** How many people understood the meaning of the code that Yehonatan said when he shot his arrows?

* Look for the answers on page 11!

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## דַּקָּה שֶׁל דִּיּוּן • One-Minute Debate

**Debate: It would be more fun to be part of a larger שֵׁבֶט (shevet, tribe).**

### *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!*

- It's like going to a big school. At first it's intimidating, but it's actually better than a small school because there's more variety among the people. You can find friends who share your interests.
- The biggest shevet of all was Yehudah. Most of the Jewish people end up coming from them!




### *Disagree!*

- A person can get lost in a big crowd.
- A smaller shevet would be more cozy and intimate.
- Shevet Levi was the smallest of all, and they enjoyed some very special jobs and privileges.



Learn one way the parashah practically impacts our lives

## הֲלָכָה • Halakhah

When do you become a Jewish grown-up? You probably think it's at age 12 or 13, when you hit bat or bar mitzvah, right? But if you paid attention to this week's parashah, you might have seen some other ages. As Moshe plans to count Benei



Yisrael, we hear over and over that he is supposed to count only those who are above age 20! And then, later on, when counting the Levi'im, Moshe is told to count only those over the age of 30! That's a long time to wait to become an adult!

Actually, it took a while for the ages of 12 and 13 to become the main age of adulthood in Judaism. Many earlier sources talk about stepping up to do mitzvot as soon as you are able. Here's one:

**Tosefta Hagigah 1:2**

A child... who knows how to shake something is obligated in lulav. A child who knows how to wrap themselves up is obligated in tzitzit.

**תוספתא חגיגה א:ב**

קָטָן... יוֹדֵעַ לְנַעְנֵעַ חַיָּב בְּלוּלָב,
יוֹדֵעַ לְהִתְעַטֵּף חַיָּב בְּצִיצִית.

This sounds like age doesn't matter much—what matters is if we can do the mitzvah. Still, the Shulhan Arukh says that we aren't totally obligated until 12 or 13—this "obligation" at a younger age is for practice to get us ready. (See Orah Hayyim 657:1.)

Similarly, it's mostly thought that the ages of 20 and 30 don't actually represent adulthood; they were just special requirements for serving in the army or in the mishkan (and later in history, the Beit Ha-Mikdash). But in halakhah, those ages don't disappear entirely. The Shulhan Arukh (Orah Hayyim 53:8) says that, unless you look older than your age, you can't be hired as the main cantor in a shul until you are 20! And the Rema (Orah Hayyim 581:1) reports that ideally, you shouldn't lead services on Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur unless you are 30!

The bottom line is, you might be a little more grown up than you realize, and you might also have a bit longer than you think until you become a full grown-up!



## הַפְּטָרָה • Haftarah

This Shabbat we read a haftarah called מָחָר חֹדֶשׁ (mahar hodesh), which means "tomorrow is the new month." These words are in the first pasuk of the haftarah. We read mahar hodesh when Rosh Hodesh falls on a Sunday. (Like this month: Sunday, May 17, will be Rosh Hodesh Sivan.)

The story is about David before he becomes king. That job still belongs to Shaul, but David is getting more popular. This makes Shaul very jealous. He even tries to kill David.

Now the really dramatic detail is: David is best friends with Yehonatan, and Yehonatan is Shaul's son!

In our haftarah, David and Yehonatan come up with a plan to protect David. The next day, at his family's Rosh Hodesh party, Yehonatan will watch how his father reacts to David's absence. Then Yehonatan will use a code to communicate that reaction to David. He'll shoot some arrows in a field where David is hiding, and the words he says to his servant about those arrows will tell David whether he's in danger or not.

Sure enough, Shaul gets really mad about David. Yehonatan runs away, shoots his arrows in the field, and says the words that signal danger. David hears this from his hiding place, and he knows he has to run away to save himself. But he wants to say goodbye to his best friend first. He comes out to speak with Yehonatan, they express their loyalty to each other, and then separate in tears.

The haftarah shows the power of David and Yehonatan's friendship. Here's how a mishnah summarizes it.

**Pirkei Avot 5:16**

When love depends on something–if you take that thing away, the love goes away. But when love isn't dependent on anything, that love will never end...

What's an example of love that doesn't depend on anything? The love of David and Yehonatan.

**משנה מסכת אבות ה:טז**

כָּל אַהֲבָה שֶׁהִיא תְלוּיָה בְּדָבָר, בָּטֵל דָּבָר, בְּטֵלָה אַהֲבָה. וְשֶׁאֵינָהּ תְּלוּיָה בְּדָבָר, אֵינָהּ בְּטֵלָה לְעוֹלָם...

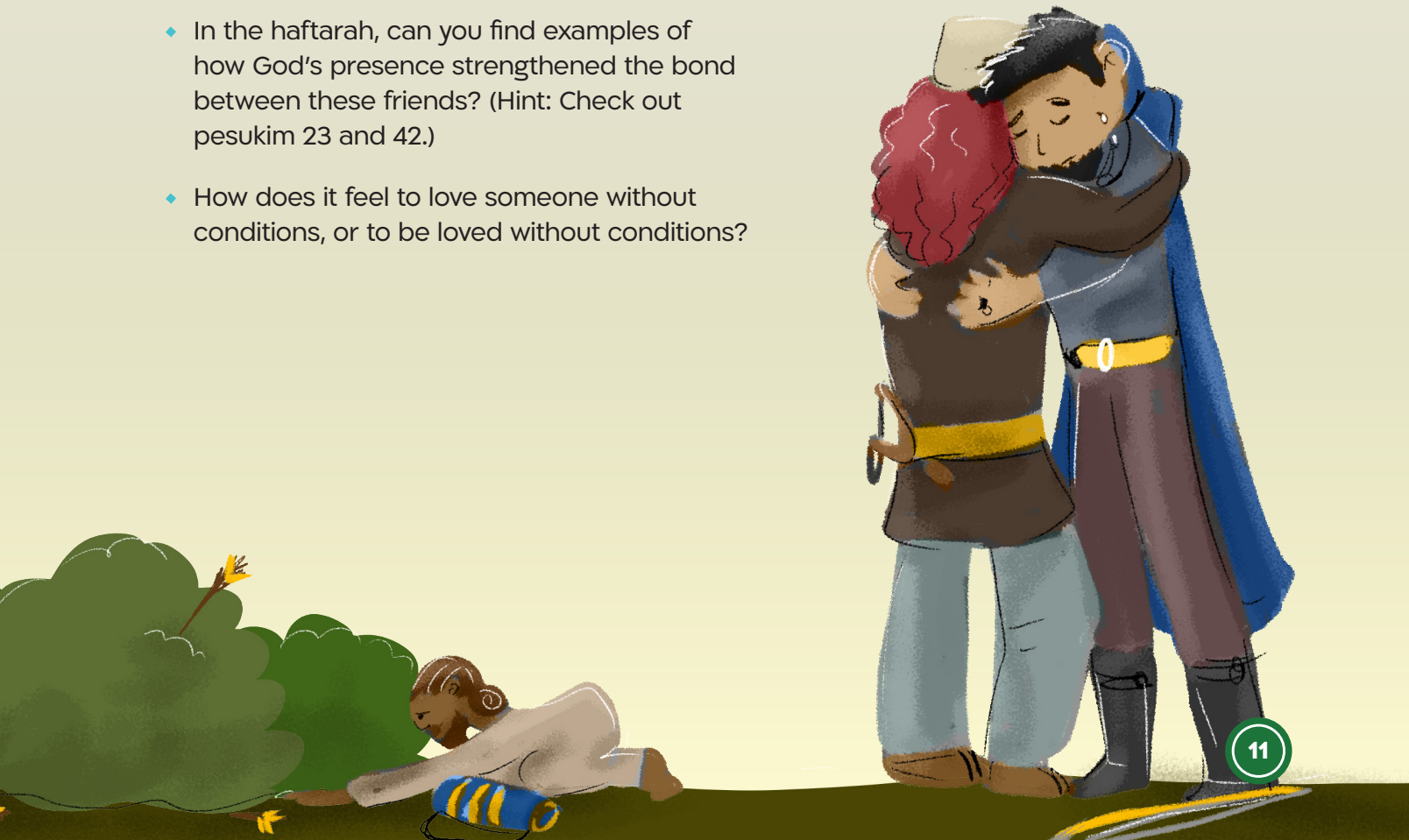
שֶׁאֵינָהּ תְּלוּיָה בְּדָבָר, זוֹ אַהֲבַת דָּוִד וְיהוֹנָתָן.




## Parashah Scavenger Hunt Answers:

1. מִדְבַּר סִינָי (Midbar Sinai, the wilderness of Sinai) (1:19)
2. Yehudah with a count of 74,600 and Dan in second place with 62,700 (1:27, 1:39)
3. Dan, Asher, and Naftali (2:25-29)
4. The tribe of Levi receives the role that was originally for firstborns (3:12)
5. Merari (3:36)
6. 273 more firstborns than Levi'im (3:46)
7. The מִזְבֵּחַ (mizbei'ah, altar) (4:13)
8. The נָשִׂיא (nasi, chief) of the tribe of Gad was named Eliasaf ben Re'uel (2:14); Re'uel is one of the names of Moshe's father-in-law (more commonly called Yitro).
9. The family of Gershon has 7,500 (3:22), the family of Kehat has 8,600 (3:28), and the family of Merari has 6,200 (3:34). That adds up to 22,300. But the Torah tells us (in 3:39) that the total Levi count was 22,000!
10. Only Yehonatan and David (Shmuel Alef 20:39)

- What aspects of David and Yehonatan's friendship stand out in our haftarah? Why is their friendship a good example of unconditional love?
- Shaul tells Yehonatan that he's not acting in his own self-interest. If David becomes king, then Yehonatan won't! Why might Yehonatan have been loyal to his friend anyhow?
- In the haftarah, can you find examples of how God's presence strengthened the bond between these friends? (Hint: Check out pesukim 23 and 42.)
- How does it feel to love someone without conditions, or to be loved without conditions?



## תְּפִלָּה • Prayer in the Parashah

Counting comes up a lot in our parashah and it's a theme in tefillah as well. Here's a pasuk about counting that is part of Pesukei D'Zimra, the warmup section of Shaharit (the morning prayer).

| **Tehillim 147:4** | **תהלים קמז:ד** |
| --- | --- |
| God counts the numbers of the stars,<br>Giving each one a name. | מוֹנֶה מִסְפָּר לַכּוֹכָבִים<br>לְכֻלָּם שֵׁמוֹת יִקְרָא: |

- What do you notice? What do you wonder about?
- Why might God count the stars?
- What's the connection between counting and naming?

This isn't the only place in Tanakh where counting the stars appears. God points out that Avram (before he was called Avraham) cannot count the stars, but that his descendants will be as numerous as the stars (Bereishit 15:5). When Benei Yisrael stand ready to enter Eretz Yisrael, they are "as numerous as the stars in the sky" (Devarim 1:10). In language that is similar to the pasuk in Tehillim, the prophet Yeshayahu describes God placing the stars in the sky, counting them, and naming them (Yeshayahu 40:5).

- How might counting the stars represent God's power? How might it represent God's attention to detail? What else could it represent?
- In last year's Devash for Bemidbar we saw a midrash (quoted by Rashi) that says that God counts Benei Yisrael all the time because God loves us. Next time you look up at the stars, try thinking about God counting them, and how that could also be a sign of God's love. What different feelings do you experience when you look at a star-filled sky?

