HADAR Children & Families
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חֻקַּת-בָּלָק Hukkat-Balak

DEVASH
Because learning Torah is sweet

וּ – י"ב תַּמּוּז תשפ"ו June 21–27, 2026

מָה בַּפָּרָשָׁה • In This Week's Parashah

- It's a double parashah! We read both Hukkat and Balak.
- The ashes of a פָּרָה אֲדֻמָּה (parah adumah, red cow) can purify anyone who becomes טָמֵא (tamei, impure) through contact with a dead body.
- Benei Yisrael lack water and complain. God tells Moshe and Aharon to take a staff and speak to a rock. Moshe hits the rock twice, and it gushes water.
- God tells Moshe and Aharon, "Because you failed to sanctify Me, you will not enter Eretz Yisrael."
- Miriam and Aharon both die.
- Benei Yisrael complain again about lack of food and water. God sends deadly snakes. God tells Moshe to create a copper snake and put it up on a pole. Whoever looks at this is healed.
- Balak, the king of Moav, dislikes Benei Yisrael. He sends messengers to Bilam, who is known for cursing people, asking him to curse Benei Yisrael.
- Bilam sets out to meet Balak. God sends an angel with a sword, which only Bilam's donkey can see.

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- The donkey swerves off the road, then squishes into a wall, and finally stops and sits down. Bilam hits the donkey each time. Then, God lets the animal speak!
- Balak and Bilam meet up. Whenever Bilam opens his mouth to curse Benei Yisrael, blessings come out instead. After this happens three times, Balak sends Bilam away.

פְּשַׁט הַפְּסוּקִים • Understanding the Verses

Bilam's donkey can see a scary angel with a sword. So the donkey keeps stopping along the way. This makes Bilam angry because Bilam can't see the angel. When Bilam gets violent with his animal, the donkey speaks up!

Bemidbar 22:28-30

Then God opened the donkey's mouth, and the donkey said to Bilam, "What have I done to you that you have beaten me these three times?"

Bilam said to the donkey, "You have made a mockery of me! If I had a sword with me, I'd kill you."

The donkey said to Bilam, "Am I not your donkey that you have ridden for so long? Have I ever done this to you before?"
And he answered, "No."

במדבר כב:כח-ל

וַיִּפְתַּח ה' אֶת פִּי הָאָתוֹן וַתֹּאמֶר לְבִלְעָם
מֶה עָשִׂיתִי לְךָ כִּי הִכִּיתַנִי זֶה שָׁלֹשׁ
רְגָלִים:

וַיֹּאמֶר בִּלְעָם לָאָתוֹן כִּי הִתְעַלַּלְתְּ בִּי
לוּ יֶשׁ חֶרֶב בְּיָדִי כִּי עַתָּה הֲרַגְתִּיךְ:

וַתֹּאמֶר הָאָתוֹן אֶל בִּלְעָם
הֲלוֹא אָנֹכִי אֲתֹנְךָ אֲשֶׁר רָכַבְתָּ עָלַי
מֵעוֹדְךָ עַד הַיּוֹם הַזֶּה
הַהַסְכֵּן הִסְכַּנְתִּי לַעֲשׂוֹת לְךָ כֹּה
וַיֹּאמֶר לֹא:



- Why might Bilam have gotten so angry at his donkey? Was this an appropriate reaction? Why not?
- What do you notice about the way God makes a miracle for the donkey to speak? Does anything about the way it's described in the Torah surprise you? What do you think this could be teaching us about other animals or about the way human beings can speak?
- There are only two talking animals in the whole Torah, and this is one of them! Why do you think this story has a talking animal? What could that teach us?

פֵּרוּשִׁים • Commentary

One of the blessings Bilam ends up giving Benei Yisrael is:

Bemidbar 23:9

They will be a people who live alone

במדבר כג:ט

הֵן עָם לְבָדָד יִשְׁכֹּן

What does this mean? And what's so good about living alone? Here are two ideas:

Ibn Ezra (Spain, 900 years ago)

For Bilam saw in his wisdom that Benei Yisrael will stand alone and will not be mixed with others who might overpower them to abandon their Torah.

אבן עזרא

כִּי רָאָה בְּחָכְמָתוֹ שֶׁתַּעֲמֹד זֹאת הָאֻמָּה לְבַדָּהּ וְלֹא תִּתְעָרֵב עִם אַחֶרֶת מִתְגַּבֶּרֶת עָלֶיהָ לַעֲזֹב תּוֹרָתוֹ.

For Ibn Ezra, the important thing about being alone is being **not influenced** by others. Living too close to other nations can make it tempting for Jews to stop keeping the Torah.



- The people around us often have a strong influence on our behavior. This can be called peer pressure—it's "pressure" because it can feel like we're being pushed to do something, even if we don't want to. Can you think of a time when you needed to separate yourself from something or someone else in order to not be influenced? How did this feel?
- What are some ways that Jewish people can protect their loyalty to the Torah and avoid being tempted to stop keeping it?
- Are there also downsides to keeping apart from other nations?

Content and editing by Yitzhak Bronstein, Elie Kaunfer, Chana Kupetz, Shoshie Lockshin, Jeremy Tabick, Ethan Tucker, Effy Unterman. Illustration by Chaim File. Design by Jen Klor.

Bekhor Shor (France, 900 years ago)

Someone who doesn't fear anything can live alone and doesn't need a group.

בכור שור

מִי שֶׁאֵינוֹ יָרֵא כְּלוּם יוֹשֵׁב בָּדָד וְאֵינוֹ צָרִיךְ חֲבוּרָה.



For Bekhor Shor, a nation is able to stay alone and independent if it is unafraid. If it's afraid for its safety, though, then it will need to make pacts with other nations for protection. Bilam's promise is that the Jewish people will not have to worry about their safety.

- Why might Benei Yisrael feel so safe? Who would be protecting the Jewish nation if other nations aren't?
- Can you think of a time when you felt completely safe and secure? What was that like for you?
- What might enable a person or a nation to feel safe and secure? Would you rather have a world with no threats and nothing to be afraid of, or a world where you are simply strong enough to beat every threat? Why?
- Even if you don't need help or protection from others, is there value in working together anyway? Is there a difference between being independent and being alone?



מִדְרָשׁ • Midrash

Bemidbar 20:29

The whole community knew that Aharon had breathed his last. The entire house of Israel wept for Aharon for thirty days.

במדבר כ:כט

וַיִּרְאוּ כָּל הָעֵדָה כִּי גָוַע אַהֲרֹן וַיִּבְכּוּ אֶת אַהֲרֹן שְׁלֹשִׁים יוֹם כֹּל בֵּית יִשְׂרָאֵל:



When a person dies, their close family and friends are sad and they mourn. Why does the Torah emphasize that **ALL** of Benei Yisrael cried when Aharon died?

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

Avot D'Rabbi Natan 12:3

When two people were fighting with each other, Aharon would go and sit next to one of them and say: "My child, look at what your friend is going through! Your friend is heartbroken and sad. Your friend is saying, 'How can I face my friend? I am so ashamed, I am at fault.'" Aharon would sit with this person until the jealousy left their heart.

Then Aharon would go to sit with the other person in the fight and say: "My child, look at what your friend is going through! Your friend is heartbroken and sad. Your friend is saying, 'How can I face my friend? I am so ashamed, I am at fault.'" Aharon would sit with this person until the jealousy left their heart.

Then when the two people saw each other, they would embrace and kiss one another. And that is why the Torah says, "The entire house of Israel wept for Aharon for thirty days."

אבות דרבי נתן יב:ג

שְׁנֵי בְּנֵי אָדָם שֶׁעָשׂוּ מְרִיבָה זֶה
עִם זֶה, הָלַךְ אַהֲרֹן וְיָשַׁב אֵצֶל אֶחָד
מֵהֶם אָמַר לוֹ: בְּנִי רְאֵה חֲבֵרְךָ מַהוּ,
מְטָרֵף אֶת לִבּוֹ וְקוֹרֵעַ אֶת בְּגָדָיו.
אוֹמֵר: אוֹי לִי הֵיאַךְ אֶשָּׂא אֶת עֵינַי
וְאֶרְאֶה אֶת חֲבֵרִי בּוֹשְׁתִּי הֵימֶנּוּ
שֶׁאֲנִי הוּא שֶׁסָּרַחְתִּי עָלָיו. הוּא
יוֹשֵׁב אֶצְלוֹ עַד שֶׁמַּסִּיר קִנְאָה מִלִּבּוֹ.

וְהוֹלֵךְ אַהֲרֹן וְיוֹשֵׁב אֵצֶל הָאַחֵר
וְאָמַר לוֹ: בְּנִי רְאֵה חֲבֵרְךָ מַהוּ,
מְטָרֵף אֶת לִבּוֹ וְקוֹרֵעַ אֶת בְּגָדָיו.
אוֹמֵר: אוֹי לִי הֵיאַךְ אֶשָּׂא אֶת עֵינַי
וְאֶרְאֶה אֶת חֲבֵרִי בּוֹשְׁתִּי הֵימֶנּוּ
שֶׁאֲנִי הוּא שֶׁסָּרַחְתִּי עָלָיו. הוּא
יוֹשֵׁב אֶצְלוֹ עַד שֶׁמַּסִּיר קִנְאָה מִלִּבּוֹ.

וּכְשֶׁנִּפְגְּשׁוּ זֶה בְּזֶה גָּפְפוּ וְנָשְׁקוּ זֶה
לָזֶה. לְכָךְ נֶאֱמַר "וַיִּבְכּוּ אֶת אַהֲרֹן
שְׁלֹשִׁים יוֹם כֹּל בֵּית יִשְׂרָאֵל."



The midrash explains that Aharon went above and beyond his role as the High Priest to bring peace to the community of Israel. Even when he wasn't involved in an argument, he would go out of his way to try to help resolve conflict between people.



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- What do you think about Aharon's strategy for peace-making? Why was it effective?
- How does this story explain why people felt so sad when Aharon died? What had they lost?

Hillel the Elder teaches us that we should all strive to be like Aharon.



Mishnah Avot 1:12

Be among the students of Aharon, loving peace and pursuing peace,
loving human beings and drawing them close to the Torah.

משנה אבות א:יב

הֱוֵי מִתַּלְמִידָיו שֶׁל אַהֲרֹן, אוֹהֵב שָׁלוֹם וְרוֹדֵף שָׁלוֹם, אוֹהֵב אֶת הַבְּרִיּוֹת וּמְקָרְבָן לַתּוֹרָה:

- What seems to go hand in hand with coming close to the Torah?
- What can you do to bring peace into your world?

Our rabbis say that even King Shlomo, who was the wisest person ever, couldn't understand the reason for the rules of the פָּרָה אֲדֻמָּה (parah adumah, red cow). (Bemidbar Rabbah 19:3 and see Tell Me More About This! on p. 8.)



דַּקָּה שֶׁל דִּיּוּן • One-Minute Debate

Debate: Every mitzvah has a reason.

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!

- Just because you don't understand the reason for a mitzvah yet, that doesn't mean there isn't one. Sometimes you might have to spend your whole life trying to figure out what the reason is!
- God wouldn't command something without a good reason.



Disagree!

- A חֹק (hok) is a mitzvah that doesn't have a reason. Our job is to accept that and perform it anyway.
- Some mitzvot might seem random, but they give you an opportunity to show faith and obey God whether or not it makes sense to you.
- God doesn't need a reason. The King can do whatever the King wants.

aliyot:
1) Bemidbar 19:1 to 20:6
2) 20:7 to 21
3) 20:22 to 21:20
4) 21:21 to 22:12
5) 22:13 to 22:38
6) 22:39 to 23:26
7) 23:27 to 25:9

haftarah: Micah 5:6 to 6:8

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. What cannot go on a פָּרָה אֲדֻמָּה (parah adumah, red cow)?
2. What path does Moshe want to take?
3. What kind of a snake did God tell Moshe to make?
4. What does Balak plan to do after Bilam curses Benei Yisrael?
5. Who is with Bilam when he is on his exciting donkey ride?
6. How many altars does Balak build in Bamot Ba'al?
7. How is Pinhas related to Aharon?
8. How many different things get hit with sticks in our parashah?
9. What place in the parashah shares its name with a part of the Pesah Seder?
10. **From the haftarah:** On a future judgment day, what will God do to sorcery and magic?

* Look for the answers on page 11!





HADAR Children & Families

הדר HADAR TORAH · AVODAH · HESED

רֶגַע שֶׁל עִבְרִית • A Moment of Hebrew

Bemidbar 19:2

This is the ritual law that God has commanded: Tell Benei Yisrael to bring you a perfect red cow, that has no defect, and which has not had a burden **raised** on it.

במדבר יט:ב

זֹאת חֻקַּת הַתּוֹרָה אֲשֶׁר צִוָּה ה' לֵאמֹר דַּבֵּר אֶל בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וְיִקְחוּ אֵלֶיךָ פָּרָה אֲדֻמָּה תְּמִימָה אֲשֶׁר אֵין בָּהּ מוּם אֲשֶׁר לֹא **עָלָה** עָלֶיהָ עֹל:

לַעֲלוֹת (שֹׁרֶשׁ ע.ל.ה)
To go up (la'alot)

עוֹלֶה חָדָשׁ/עוֹלָה חֲדָשָׁה
An immigrant to Israel (oleh hadash/olah hadashah)



לְמַעְלָה
Up (lema'alah)

מַעֲלִית
Elevator (ma'alit)

עֲלוֹת הַשַּׁחַר
Dawn (the rise of morning) (alot ha-shahar)

עֲלִיָּה
1. When a person "goes up" to recite berakhot over the Torah reading
2. Slope or rise (aliyah)

עוֹלֶה
"Go team!" (oleh)

(See Shmuel Alef 2:14!)

כֹּל אֲשֶׁר יַעֲלֶה הַמַּזְלֵג
Potluck (literally: anything the fork lifts up) (kol asher ya'aleh ha-mazleg)

Find the Word!

Which kind of קָרְבָּן (korban, sacrifice) has this שֹׁרֶשׁ (shoresh, root) in its name? Can you explain why? (Hint: Look in Vayikra chapter 1.)

בּוֹאוּ נְדַבֵּר עַל זֶה • Tell Me More About This!

The rituals of the פָּרָה אֲדֻמָּה (parah adumah, red cow) are described as חֻקַּת הַתּוֹרָה (hukkat ha-Torah, the "hok" of the Torah). **What's a hok?**

It's a kind of mitzvah. Our Rabbis explain that all mitzvot can be put into two categories:

Rambam Me'ilah 8:8

Mishpatim are mitzvot whose reasons are obvious, and the good they cause in the world is known. These are things like the prohibition of stealing and killing, and the command to respect your parents.

Hukkim (the plural of hok) are mitzvot whose reasons aren't known. Our Sages said: "These are hukkim that I (God) established for you, and you do not have permission to question them."

רמב"ם הלכות מעילה ח:ח

וְהַמִּשְׁפָּטִים הֵן הַמִּצְוֹת שֶׁטַּעְמָן גָּלוּי וְטוֹבַת עֲשִׂיָּתָן בָּעוֹלָם הַזֶּה יְדוּעָה כְּגוֹן אִסּוּר גֵּזֶל וּשְׁפִיכוּת דָּמִים וְכִבּוּד אָב וָאֵם.

וְהַחֻקִּים הֵן הַמִּצְוֹת שֶׁאֵין טַעְמָן יָדוּעַ. אָמְרוּ חֲכָמִים חֻקִּים חַקּוֹתִי לְךָ וְאֵין לְךָ רְשׁוּת לְהַרְהֵר בָּהֶן.

Another way to describe the difference is that mishpatim are rules that we'd probably figure out using our own ability to reason even if God hadn't commanded them. They're obviously good for us or good for society.





But would you come up on your own with the idea of using the ashes of a red cow to get rid of טֻמְאָה (tum'ah, impurity)? We didn't think so! That's why parah adumah is such a powerful example of a hok.

- Can you think of other examples of hukkim, mitzvot that you observe even though you don't understand their reason, or what good they accomplish in the world?
- How is the experience of observing mishpatim and observing hukkim different for you?
- Earlier in this text, Rambam says that we're generally supposed to think hard about mitzvot and try our best to figure out their reasons. But not everyone agrees. What are the benefits and drawbacks of trying to understand the reasons for mitzvot when they're not obvious?





הֲלָכָה • Halakhah



Do you have a pet? How many times a day do you feed them? When you are hungry, do you ever think about whether your pet is hungry? The Talmud gives us clear guidance about how we should behave in this regard:

Talmud Bavli Berakhot 40a

Rav Yehudah said in the name of Rav: A person may not eat before feeding their animals, as it says: "And I shall give you grass in your field for your animals" and only later does it say, "And you shall eat and be satisfied" (Devarim 8:10).

תלמוד בבלי מסכת ברכות דף מ עמוד א

אָמַר רַב יְהוּדָה אָמַר רַב: אָסוּר לָאָדָם שֶׁיֹּאכַל קֹדֶם שֶׁיִּתֵּן מַאֲכָל לִבְהֶמְתּוֹ, שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר: "וְנָתַתִּי עֵשֶׂב בְּשָׂדְךָ לִבְהֶמְתֶּךָ" וַהֲדַר "וְאָכַלְתָּ וְשָׂבָעְתָּ."

Rav is reading carefully. He notices that in Devarim chapter 11, the second paragraph of the Shema, the Torah first talks about God giving food for animals and only then talks about us (humans) eating. He learns from here that you have to make sure your animals are fed and aren't hungry before you sit down to your own dinner.

But what if you are thirsty? Another source draws on this week's parashah to reach a different conclusion:

Parashah Scavenger Hunt Answers:

1. A yoke (19:2)
2. The king's path (20:17)
3. A שָׂרָף (saraf, a snake that burns) (21:8)
4. Wage war against Benei Yisrael (22:6)
5. Two of his servants (22:22)
6. Seven (22:41–23:1)
7. Pinhas is Aharon's grandson (25:7)
8. Two: a rock (20:11) and a donkey (22:27)
9. Kadesh, where Miriam died (20:1)
10. Destroy it! (Micah 5:11)



Sefer Hasidim #531

With regard to drinking, people can drink first and only later give to their animals, as it says [in Parashat Hukkat], "And you shall give water to the community and to their flocks" (Bemidbar 20:8). First the community and then the flocks!

ספר חסידים סימן תקלא

לְעִנְיַן צְמְאוֹן אָדָם וּבְהֵמָה יִתְּנוּ לָאָדָם תְּחִלָּה וְאַחַר כָּךְ לִבְהֵמָה דִּכְתִיב..."וְהִשְׁקִיתָ אֶת הָעֵדָה וְאֶת בְּעִירָם." הָעֵדָה תְּחִלָּה וְאַחַר כָּךְ אֶת בְּעִירָם.

When Moshe is told in this week's parashah to give water to the thirsty people, God says to first give water to the human beings and only then to the animals.

Why would drinking and eating have different rules?

One later commentator suggests two possibilities: 1) Thirst is more intense than hunger, so we let you take care of yourself first; 2) Eating a meal is a longer process and you may get caught up in it and forget about your pets and their needs. (Har Tzvi OH I:90)

So, next time you're about to sit down to eat, don't forget to feed your pets first. But if you are thirsty, drink up, and thank this week's parashah!



תְּפִלָּה • Prayer in the Parashah

The Mah Tovu prayer appears in siddurim at the beginning of Shaharit, and it's customary to say it when entering a prayer space. The opening line of this prayer comes from our parashah. Bilam is trying to curse Benei Yisrael, but instead he says:

Bemidbar 24:5

Mah tovu (how nice) are your tents, Yaakov,
Your dwellings, Yisrael.

במדבר כד:ה

מַה טֹּבוּ אׇהָלֶיךָ יַעֲקֹב
מִשְׁכְּנֹתֶיךָ יִשְׂרָאֵל׃

It's an example of parallelism, a feature of biblical poetry we've seen before in Devash! The same idea is repeated twice, using different words.

But according to a midrash, the repetition here actually indicates two different kinds of places:

Midrash Lekah Tov

"Your tents, Yaakov" – these are batei midrash (places to study Torah).
"Your dwellings, Yisrael" – these are batei knesset (synagogues).

פסיקתא זוטרתא (לקח טוב)
במדבר דף קכט עמוד א

אׇהָלֶיךָ יַעֲקֹב - אֵלּוּ בָּתֵּי מִדְרָשׁוֹת.
מִשְׁכְּנוֹתֶיךָ יִשְׂרָאֵל - אֵלּוּ בָּתֵּי כְּנֵסִיּוֹת.

- The first line is about an אׇהֶל (ohel, tent) and the second line is about a מִשְׁכָּן (mishkan, dwelling). How does ohel relate to Torah, and how does mishkan relate to prayer? What does it mean that the mishkan, God's sanctuary in the wilderness, was also called the אׇהֶל מוֹעֵד (ohel mo'ed, tent of meeting)?
- When we go into shul, why might we quote Bilam, a prophet who was trying to curse Benei Yisrael but ended up blessing them? (Fun fact: Maharshal actually objected to saying Mah Tovu because it came from the mouth of Bilam! See Shut Maharshal 64.)
- How do you feel when entering a synagogue? What hopes do you have?
- How is a synagogue like a beit midrash? How are these different?

