

BEMIDBAR

NASO

BEHAALOTKHA

SHELAH

KORAH

HUKKAT

BALAK

PINHAS

MATTOT-MASEI



July 20-26, 2025 כ"ד תמוז - א' אב תשפ"ה



• In This Week's Parashah קה בפךרשה

- נְדָרִים (nedarim, vows) are obligations you can accept upon yourself, like voluntary mitzvot, and they have to be taken seriously if you make them. Nedarim can sometimes be canceled.
- Benei Yisrael fight against Midyan. They win, capture spoils of war, and divide it all up. A portion was given to the Mishkan.
- The tribes of Reuven and Gad want to stay outside Eretz Yisrael, just to the east of the Jordan River, where there is lots of room for their cattle. They make a deal with Moshe. First they'll join Benei Yisrael in fighting for Eretz Yisrael, and then they can return to live outside it.
- The Torah lists all 42 stops that Benei Yisrael made while wandering in the wilderness.
- Now they are at the edge of Eretz Yisrael. They are commanded to conquer the land and settle there.
- They learn how to divide the land among their families, and to establish cities for לְוִיִּם (Levi'im). These include six עָרֵי מִקְלָט (arei miklat, cities of refuge). If a person accidentally kills someone else, they have to move to one of these cities.



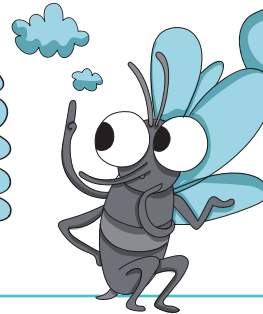


מִדְרָשׁ • Midrash

The tribes of Reuven and Gad ask Moshe for permission to settle just outside אֶרֶץ יִשְׂרָאֵל (Eretz Yisrael, the Land of Israel).

When Moshe hears their request, his response is a strong, "No way!" (Bemidbar 32:6-15).

The tribes respond to Moshe's concerns, and yet Moshe still doesn't seem totally satisfied (Bemidbar 32:20-24). Why not? Are there clues in the Torah that can help us better understand what's bothering Moshe?



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

Midrash Tanhuma

These tribes treated the ikkar (the more important thing) as tafeil (the less important thing), and the tafeil as ikkar. How?

They valued their property more than their people when they said to Moshe, "we will build here pens for our flocks," first, and only afterwards, "towns for our children" (Bemidbar 32:16).

Moshe said to them, "Don't do it that way. The ikkar should be first, 'build towns for your children.' Only after that, 'pens for your flocks' (Bemidbar 32:24)."

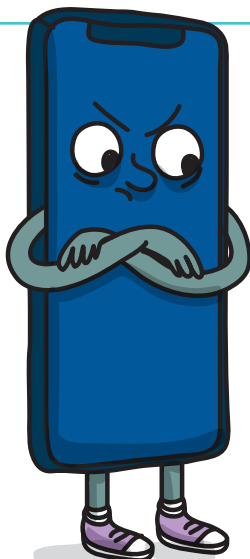
מדרש תנחומא מטות ז

עָשׂוּ אֶת הָעֵקֶר טֵפֵל, וְהַטֵּפֵל עֵקֶר. לָמָּה?

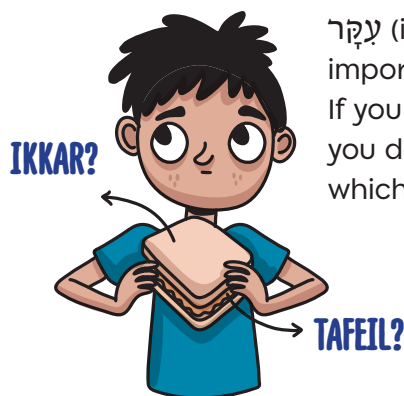
שָׁחַבּוּ בְכִסְיָהֶם יוֹתֵר מִגּוֹפָן, שָׁאֲמְרוּ לְמֹשֶׁה, "גִּדְרֹת צֹאן נִבְנֶה לְמִקְנֵנוּ פֹה" תְּחִלָּה, וְאַחֲרֵי כֵן, "וְעִירִים לְטִפְנֵנוּ" (בַּמִּדְבָּר לִב:טז).

אָמַר לָהֶם מֹשֶׁה, לֹא תַעֲשׂוּ כֵן. עָשׂוּ אֶת הָעֵקֶר תְּחִלָּה - "בְּנוֹ-לָכֶם עִירִים לְטִפְכֶּם." וְאַחֲרֵי כֵן - "וְגִדְרֹת לְצִנְאָכֶם" (בַּמִּדְבָּר לִב:כד).

- What is this midrash teaching about priorities? How can a person show that they value their family more than material things?



- ♦ As you read Moshe's conversation with these tribes (it takes up most of chapter 32), what else do you notice Moshe emphasizing to them? What else seems to be important to him?



עִקָּר (ikkar, the more important thing) and טֵפֵּל (tafeil, the less important thing) are also categories in halakhah. The Mishnah asks: If you have a plate of different kinds of food in front of you, how do you decide which בְּרָכָה (berakhah, blessing) to say first? Figure out which food is the ikkar, and start with that one (Berakhot 6:7)!



Send us your thoughts or questions from learning the parashah. We'll write back to you, and some will get published in future issues of Devash!

Write to us at devash@hadar.org

פְּרָשְׁנוֹת • Commentary

Bemidbar 33:1

These were the marches of Benei Yisrael, who left Egypt, troop by troop, led by Moshe and Aharon.

This introduces a list of every one of the 42 places in the מִדְבָּר (midbar, wilderness) where Benei Yisrael stopped along their journey to Eretz Yisrael.

Why do we need this list? Does it add something to what we've already learned through the whole book of Bemidbar?

במדבר לג:א

אֵלֶּה מַסְעֵי בְנֵי־יִשְׂרָאֵל אֲשֶׁר יָצְאוּ
מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם לְעִבְרַתָּם בְּיַד־מֹשֶׁה
וְאַהֲרֹן:



Rashi offers two explanations.

Rashi #1

רש"י

Why are these marches recorded here? To tell us about God's kindness. Although God decreed that they would have to wander in the wilderness, you should not think that they wandered without any rest...

למה נכתבו המסעות הללו? להודיע
חסדיו של מקום, שאף על פי שגזר עליהם
לטלטלם ולהניעם במדבר, לא תאמר שהיו
נעים ומטלטלים ממסע למסע כל ארבעים
שנה ולא היתה להם מנוחה...

Rashi #2

רש"י

R. Tanhuma gave another explanation, with a mashal (parable). It's like a king whose son was sick and whom he took to a faraway place for treatment. On the way home, the father would recall the stops along their journey, saying to his son, "Here we slept, here we got cold, here you had that headache, etc."

ורבי תנחומא דרש בו דרשה אחרת:
משל למלך שהיה בנו חולה והוליכו
למקום רחוק לרפאתו. כיון שהיו
חוזרין התחיל אביו מונה כל
המסעות, אמר לו, כאן ישננו, כאן
הוקרנו, כאן חששת את ראשך וכו':

For more on how a mashal works,
see Devash on Behaalotkha!



According to Rashi's first answer, the list of stops gives us information about God's kindness to Benei Yisrael.



According to Rashi's second answer, the list of stops is a chance for Benei Yisrael to reflect back on their journey with God, and to appreciate how there were a lot of tough moments along the way, but they seem to have ended up in a good place together (finally about to go into Eretz Yisrael).

- ◆ What's it like to reminisce on the way home from a trip? Why do you think people like to remember the stories of things that happen to them? How can it impact our experience?
- ◆ Explain Rashi's two answers in your own words. What is each one adding to our understanding of the pesukim?





הַלָּכָה • Halakhah

If a pot is used to cook non-kosher food, then the pot may not be kosher anymore. But can you make it kosher again?

Our parashah can help answer this question. After Benei Yisrael's war with Midian, they capture a bunch of stuff. Elazar the כֹּהֵן (kohen, priest) gives instructions for how to make this stuff kosher. Objects that get used with fire should be passed through fire, and objects that are not used with fire should be dipped in water (Bemidbar 31:23).

Based on this, the Mishnah explains that the way to make something kosher is connected to the way it is used (Avodah Zarah 5:12).

In halakhic language, objects become unkosher through בְּלִיעָה (beli'ah, absorption of a flavor of non-kosher food), and they can become kosher again through פְּלִיטָה (pelitah, release of that flavor). The Gemara (Pesahim 30b) gives a general rule: כְּבֹולְעוֹ כִּךְ פּוֹלְטוֹ (ke-vol'o kakh polto), which means that the method for pelitah of an object depends on the way beli'ah happened in the first place. There are two basic strategies (Avodah Zarah 75b-76b):

לִבּוֹן/Libbun

If the dish is used with fire (like a skewer or a grill), it should be heated or placed in fire until it reaches a very high temperature.



הַגְעָלָה/Hagalah

If the dish is used with boiling water (like a soup pot or a ladle), it should be dipped in boiling water. Not every material can be made kosher this way. According to the Gemara, for example, hagalah doesn't work for ceramic or clay dishes.



*Both of these methods
can be dangerous.
So kids, don't try this
at home!*



דְּבָרָה שֶׁל דִּיּוּן • One-Minute Debate

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.



Debate: It was wrong for the tribes of Reuven, Gad, and half of Menasheh to stay outside of Eretz Yisrael.

Agree!

- ◆ Hillel said: "Do not separate yourself from the community" (Avot 2:4)! Everything works better when Benei Yisrael are all together.
- ◆ God gave Benei Yisrael a land flowing with milk and honey, and these tribes rejected it? That's so ungrateful!

Disagree!

- ◆ When it mattered, these tribes were united with Benei Yisrael. They helped the other tribes fight and get settled in the land.
- ◆ They had so much cattle! It wouldn't have been fair to expect them to crowd into land that was too small for them.
- ◆ Moshe laid out the conditions and approved the plan, so what's the problem?



רִמְעַן שֶׁל עִבְרִית • A Moment of Hebrew

Bemidbar 33:5

Benei Yisrael set out from Rameses and **camped** at Sukkot.

במדבר לג:ה

וַיֵּצְאוּ בְנֵי-יִשְׂרָאֵל מִרַעְמִסִּים וַיַּחֲנוּ בְּסֻכּוֹת:

לַחֲנוּת (שָׂרֵשׁ ח.ג.י)

- ◆ To park (lahanot)

Find the Word!

This שָׂרֵשׁ (shores, root) is all over the place in Parashat Masei. Why? How many times can you find it?

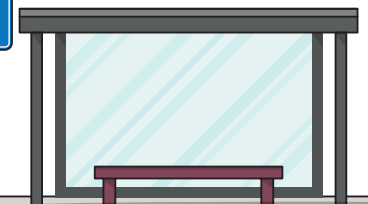
= מַחֲנֶה
Camp
(mahaneh)



= חֲנוּת
Store/shop
(hanut)

= חֲנִיּוֹן
Parking lot
(henyon)

= תַּחְנַת אוֹטוֹבּוּס
Bus stop
(tahanat otobus)





שאלות השבוע • 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 the last three are harder and can come from anywhere in the parashah.**

aliyot:

- 1) Bemidbar 30:2 to 31:12
- 2) 31:13 to 31:54
- 3) 32:1 to 32:19
- 4) 32:20 to 33:49
- 5) 33:50 to 34:15
- 6) 34:16 to 35:8
- 7) 35:9 to 36:13

Good luck!

1 Who were the five kings of Midian?

2 What percentage of the goods taken in war did the soldiers need to give as a gift to God?

3 Which tribes asked for land outside of Eretz Yisrael?

4 Where do Benei Yisrael camp after leaving Moserot?

5 What marks the western boundary of the land promised to Benei Yisrael?

6 How many cities did the לְוִיִּים (Levi'im, members of the tribe of Levi) get to live in?



7 Who did בְּנוֹת צִלְפָּחָד (benot Tzelofhad, the daughters of Tzelofhad) agree to marry?

8 On what date did Aharon die?

9 What six types of metal are mentioned in our parashah?

10 How many stops do Benei Yisrael make on their 40-year journey? (Hint: Count the word וַיַּחֲנוּ [vayahanu, they camped] each time it appears.)

*
Look for the answers on page 12!





קֶרְנֵי פָּרָה
Karnei Farah

Yerah Ben Yomo
יֶרַח בֶּן יוֹמוֹ

Yerah ben Yomo and Karnei Farah are partners in crime—they always come as a pair. And when we say “always,” we mean once! That’s right, they only appear once in the entire Torah. (There are 15 others in the rest of the Tanakh, including one in the megillah that we read on Purim.) These notes **really** look like their names. Yerah ben yomo means “day-old moon,” and it looks just like a crescent moon propped up on a stick. Karnei farah means “horns of a cow.” Here they are in our parashah:



Quick Facts

1

How many times does it appear in the Torah?

Yerah Ben Yomo: Just once!

Karnei Farah: Just once!

2

Does it end a musical phrase?

Yerah Ben Yomo: No

Karnei Farah: Yes

3

Is it above or below the word?

Yerah Ben Yomo: Below

Karnei Farah: Above

4

Where is it placed on the word?

Yerah Ben Yomo: On the accent

Karnei Farah: On the accent

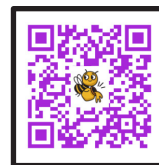
במדבר לה:ה
אֲלֵפִים בְּאַמָּה

Bemidbar 35:5

2,000 cubits



Before or
after Shabbat,
scan to hear this
Yerah Ben Yomo
and Karnei Farah!



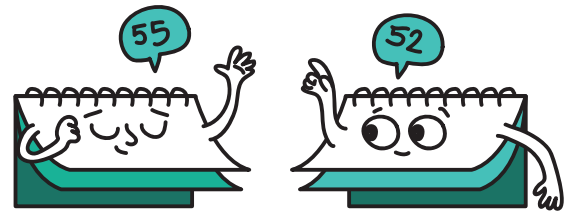
These notes are so rare, a lot of people have forgotten how to sing them, and they just make them up! But search around for experienced Torah readers and ask them how they read these special notes—you might just uncover an old tradition that was passed on for generations.

קריאת התורה • Torah Reading

This week we read a double parashah—the only one this year! Why do we ever have to double up parashiyot?

Let's think about how many Shabbatot there are in a year. A Jewish leap year has exactly 55 weeks. But it always happens that at least one Shabbat falls on Sukkot and at least one falls on Pesah, and then we read special Torah readings instead of the regular parashah. So that gets us down to 53 Shabbatot. Perfect! There are 54 parashiyot in the Torah, and the last one, Vezot Haberakhah, is read on Simhat Torah, which never falls on Shabbat. So, if we read one parashah a week, it all comes out even.

But sometimes, more holidays fall on Shabbat, and then we need to combine more parashiyot. The first combination is always Mattot and Masei.



We often have to double up even more parashiyot, according to this schedule:



second day of Shavuot falls on Shabbat → Hukat-Balak



Rosh Hashanah or Yom Kippur fall on Shabbat → Nitzavim-Vayelekh



it's not a leap year (it's usually not!) → we follow this order until we're caught up:



So why are Mattot and Masei the first ones we always double up?

Talmud Bavli Megillah 31b

R. Shimon ben Elazar says: Ezra ruled that the Jews should read the curses in Vayikra before Shavuot...

תלמוד בבלי מגילה דף לא עמוד ב

רבי שמעון בן אלקעזר אומר: עזרא תקן להו לישׂראל שיהו קורין קללות שבתורת כהנים קדם עצרת...

CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE >>



This very old tradition tells us that we are supposed to read the harsh curses in Parashat Behukotai before Shavuot. We get the “bad news” out of the way before starting a new part of our year with the new tree fruits that begin to emerge on Shavuot. The tradition became to make sure there was one parashah separating Behukotai and Shavuot, so we almost always read Bemidbar on the Shabbat before the holiday.

In a leap year, if you doubled any of those four sets of parshiyot above, that would push Behukotai too early, and too far away from Shavuot. (Some Yemenite communities don't wait that long, and they actually double up Hukat and Balak first, before turning to Mattot and Masei.)

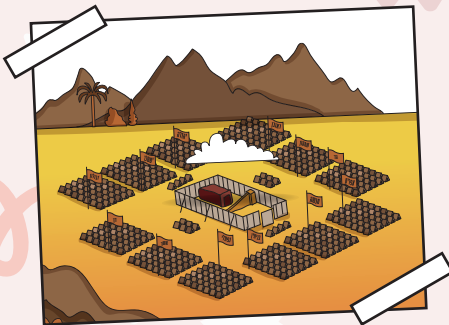
In some years, this can create a weird gap between Israel and the rest of the world.

You can see that keeping Behukotai within two weeks of Shavuot is more important than keeping the whole Jewish world on the same Torah reading. It's a reminder about how our cycle of parashiyot is also an opportunity to create certain rhythms and moods.

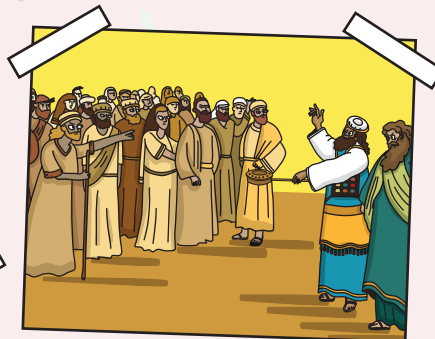


הַזָּכָרָה • Bemidbar in Review

This week we complete Sefer Bemidbar. It's been a journey!



- ◆ Benei Yisrael prepare to enter Eretz Yisrael, including being counted a couple of times, and arranging their camp.



- ◆ Some difficult struggles for Benei Yisrael: complaining, not following the leadership of Moshe and Aharon, not following God.



- ◆ Benei Yisrael end up traveling for 38 years.

What was the experience of those 38 years in the מִדְבָּר (midbar, wilderness)? How would you describe it?

Exhausting? Dusty? Confusing?

It might have been all those. But you can also think of it as a time of special closeness to God. This was when God treated Benei Yisrael with extra care, giving them the gift of מָן (mann, miraculous food from Heaven) and, according to midrashim, Miriam's miraculous moving בְּאֵר (be'er, water well).

חזק חזק ונתחזק



Fast forward several hundreds of years, and here's what the prophet Yirmiyahu had to say about the experience of the midbar.

Yirmiyahu 2:2

So said God:
I remember the devotion of your youth,
Your love as a bride—
How you followed Me in the midbar,
In a land not sown.

ירמיהו ב:ב

כֹּה אָמַר ה'
זָכַרְתִּי לָךְ חֶסֶד נְעוּרֶיךָ
אֲהֵבַת כְּלוּלָתְךָ
לְכַתֹּף אַחֲרֵי בְּמִדְבָּר
בְּאֶרֶץ לֹא זְרוּעָה:

Yirmiyahu 31:2

So said God:
A people that survived the sword
Found My favor in the midbar,
When Israel was marching homeward.

ירמיהו לא:ב

כֹּה אָמַר ה'
מָצָא חֵן בְּמִדְבָּר
עִם שְׂרִידֵי חָרָב
הַלֹּוֹף לְהַרְגִּיעוֹ יִשְׂרָאֵל:

- What do you notice in these poetic lines? What words stand out to you? Can you explain those words?
- Yirmiyahu lived at a difficult time in history, when the first Beit Ha-Mikdash was destroyed and Benei Yisrael were sent into גָּלוּת (galut, exile). How might this have affected his way of remembering the time in the midbar?





קֶה זָה • What's Going On Here?

What was an עִיר מִקְלָט (ir miklat, city of refuge)?

In the ancient world, people often took justice into their own hands. For example, if someone got killed—even by accident—their family might try to kill the person who did it. In the Torah, this is called a גּוֹ'עַל הַדָּם (go'el ha-dam, blood revenger). But the Torah didn't want people to act this way. In Sefer Devarim (16:18), we are commanded to create a court system, so that laws and justice could protect people. An ir miklat was a kind of protection; it was a place where a person who killed someone by accident could run away and be safe from a go'el ha-dam.

By the time of the Mishnah, this kind of revenge wasn't normal, so the Rabbis interpreted the ir miklat as גָּלוּת (galut, exile)—a place where a person would have to go as a punishment for killing someone by accident.



Parashah Scavenger Hunt Answers:

1. Evi, Rekem, Tzur, Hur, Reva (31:8)
2. 1 out of 500, which is 0.2% (31:28)
3. Reuven and Gad (32:5)
4. Benei Ya'akan (33:31)
5. הַיָּם הַגָּדוֹל (Ha-Yam Ha-Gadol, the Great Sea = the Mediterranean Sea) (34:6)
6. 48 (35:7)
7. Members of their own tribe, the tribe of Menasheh (36:10–12)
8. The first day of the fifth month of the 40th year since leaving Egypt (33:38)—this date on the Hebrew calendar is usually right around when we read Parashat Masei, and this year it falls on Friday, July 29
9. זָהָב (zahav, gold), כֶּסֶף (kesef, silver), נְחֹשֶׁת (nehoshet, copper), בַּרְזֵל (barzel, iron), בְּדִיל (bedil, tin), עֹפֶרֶת (oferet, lead) (31:22)
10. 42 (33:5–37, 41–49)—Rashi points out that the first 14 stops take us just past Hazerot, which was still before they were told they would wander for 40 years. And the last eight stops were after Aharon died, which we know was in the 40th year. This means that for the 38 years in the middle, Benei Yisrael only had 20 stops!

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