

- BEMIDBAR
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- SHELAH
- KORAH
- HUKKAT-BALAK
- PINHAS
- **MATTOT-MASEI**



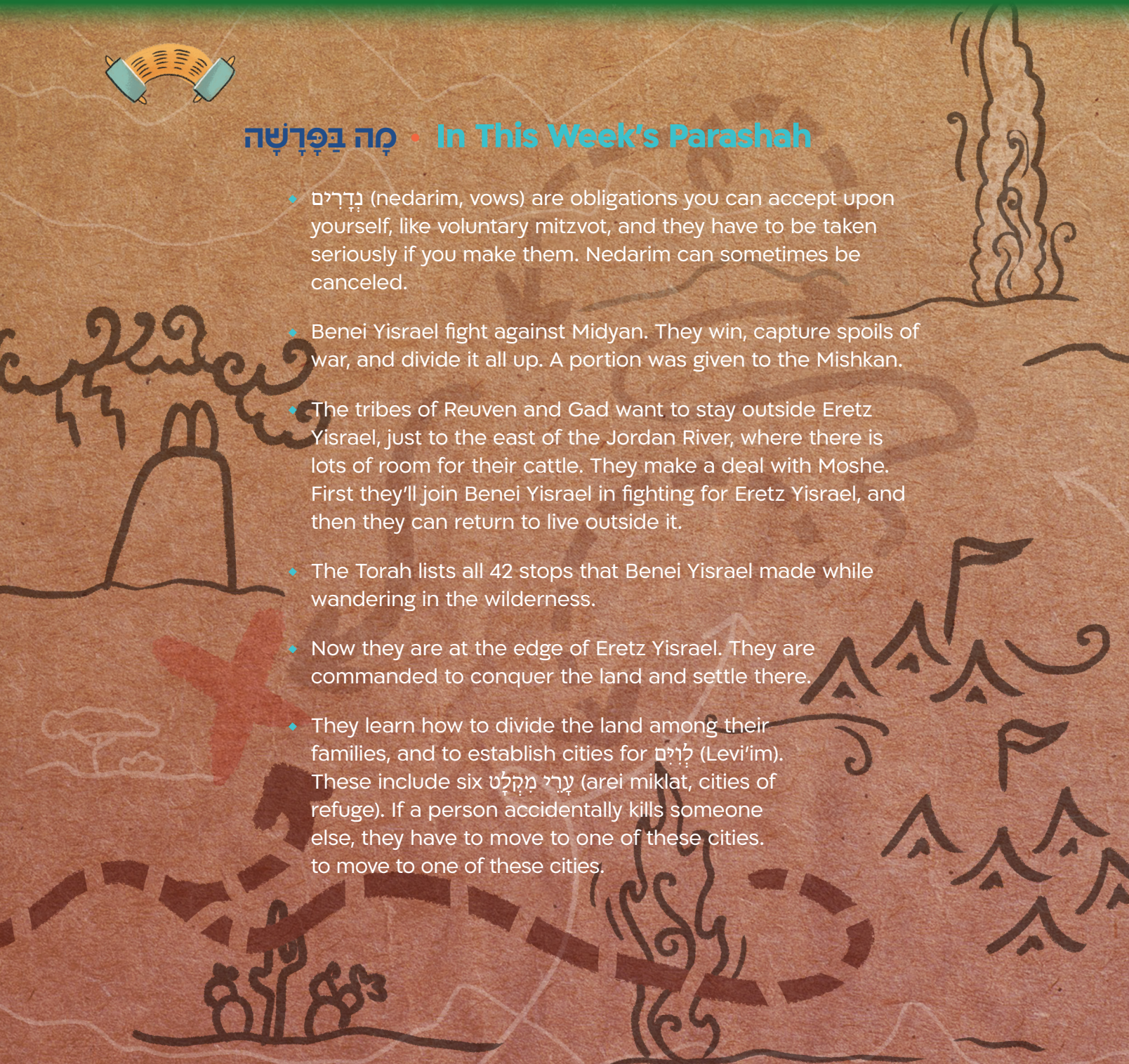
כ' - כ"ו תמוז תשפ"ו

July 5-11, 2026



מה בפַּרְשָׁה • In This Week's Parashah

- 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 מְקֻלָּט (arei miklat, cities of refuge). If a person accidentally kills someone else, they have to move to one of these cities.





פְּשׁוּט הַפְּסוּקִים • Understanding the Verses

The tribes of Reuven and Gad have lots of cattle, and they notice that the land east of the Jordan River is good for grazing. They bring a request to Moshe and the other leaders of Benei Yisrael.

Bemidbar 32:5-7

They said, "If we have found favor in your eyes, let this land be given to your servants for a possession, don't make us cross the Jordan River."

And Moshe said to the children of Gad and to the children of Reuven, "Shall your brothers go to war, while you sit here?!"

And why would you turn the hearts of Benei Yisrael away from crossing into the land that God has given them?"

במדבר לב:ה-ז

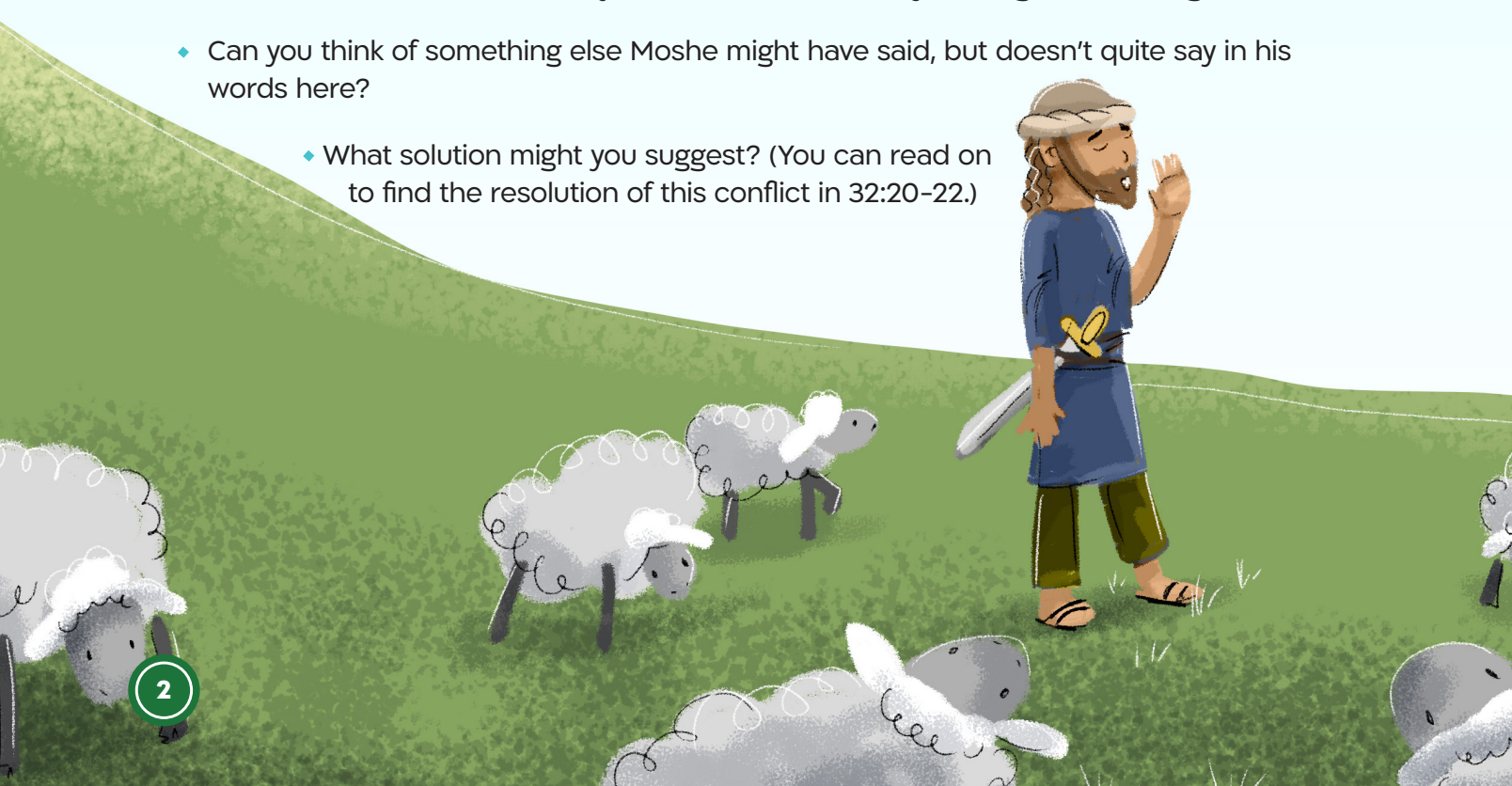
וַיֹּאמְרוּ אִם מָצְאוּנוּ חוֹן בְּעֵינֶיךָ
נָתַן אֶת הָאָרֶץ הַזֹּאת לְעֶבְדֶיךָ
לְאֶחְזָה

אֲל תַּעֲבִרְנוּ אֶת הַיַּרְדֵּן:

וַיֹּאמֶר מֹשֶׁה לְבָנֵי גָד וּלְבָנֵי רְאוּבֵן
הֲאֵחִיכֶם לְבָאוּ לְמִלְחָמָה
וְאַתֶּם תֵּשְׁבוּ פֹה:

וְלָמָּה תִגְיִאוּן אֶת יָב בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל
מֵעֲבֹר אֶל הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר נָתַן לָהֶם ה':

- ◆ What do you notice?
- ◆ Did these tribes do something wrong by asking to remain outside Eretz Yisrael? What evidence can you find?
- ◆ What are Moshe's different objections? What tone do you imagine him using?
- ◆ Can you think of something else Moshe might have said, but doesn't quite say in his words here?
- ◆ What solution might you suggest? (You can read on to find the resolution of this conflict in 32:20-22.)





Our parashah introduces a special kind of promise to God called a נֶדֶר (neder).

Bemidbar 30:3

If a person makes a neder to God or takes an oath creating an obligation on themselves, **they must not break their promise;** they must do all that they said.

במדבר ל:ג

אִישׁ כִּי יָדַר נֶדֶר לַיהוָה אוֹ הִשָּׁבַע שְׁבָעָה
לְאָסֹר אָסֹר עַל נַפְשׁוֹ
לֹא יַחַל דְּבָרוֹ
כָּכָל הַיֵּצֵא מִפִּיּוֹ יַעֲשֶׂה:



What can we learn from the words לֹא יַחַל דְּבָרוֹ (lo yahel devaro, they must not break their promise)? Does this phrase mean something different from the line that follows, which tells us that we have to do everything that we say we'll do?

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

Sifrei Bemidbar 30

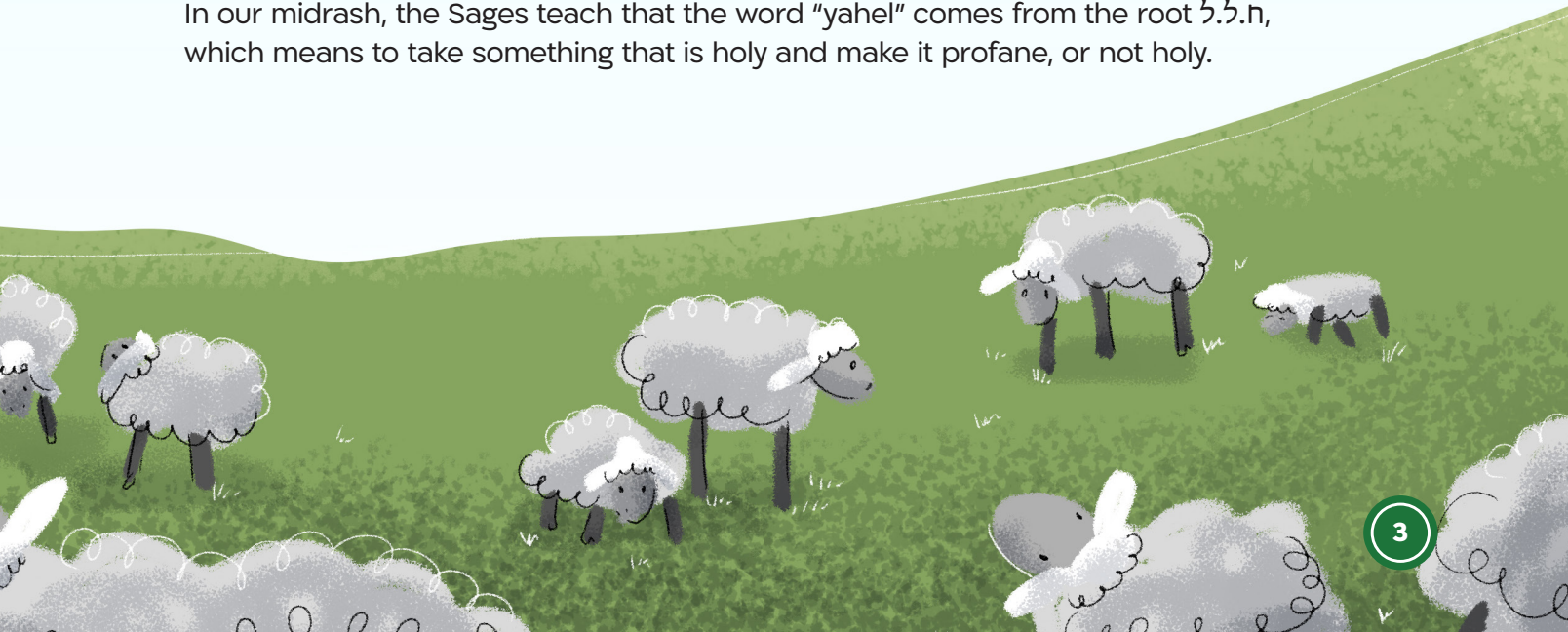
Lo yahel devaro - that is to say, they must not defile (yehalel) their words, they must not make their words unholy.

ספרי במדבר ל

לֹא יַחַל דְּבָרוֹ - כְּמוֹ: לֹא יַחַלֵּל
דְּבָרוֹ, לֹא יַעֲשֶׂה דְּבָרוֹ חֲלוּן.

Sometimes a midrash explains the simple meaning of a verse. The Rabbis sense that there is a word or an idea people might not fully understand, so they make it clear for everyone. (You might remember some examples of this kind of midrash from the maggid section of the Pesah seder.)

In our midrash, the Sages teach that the word "yahel" comes from the root ח.ל.ל, which means to take something that is holy and make it profane, or not holy.



- ◆ What makes a neder holy?
- ◆ Have you ever said something and then regretted what you said or the way you said it? What happens when a person makes a promise and then changes their mind? How about when a person makes any kind of statement but then says, "I take it back"?
- ◆ What lesson does this midrash contain even for people who don't make nedarim?
- ◆ What is the difference between holy and unholy words? How can people apply the midrash to all of their words? How can your words always be holy and never unholy?



פְּרָשְׁנוֹת • Commentary

The Torah says that if a person killed someone by accident, they should run away to an עִיר מִקְלָט (ir miklat, city of refuge). Here they would be safe from a family member of the victim who might seek revenge. This family member is called a גּוֹאֵל הַדָּם (go'el ha-dam, blood revenger).

The rule is that an accidental killer has to stay in the ir miklat until the death of the כֹּהֵן גָּדוֹל (kohen gadol, high priest). Why? **What's the connection between the exile of the killer and the death of the kohen gadol?**

Rashi (France, 1,000 years ago)

Because the kohen gadol should have prayed so that this curse (accidental murder) wouldn't have happened to Israel in his lifetime.

רש"י

לְפִי שְׁהֵיָה לּוֹ לְכֹהֵן גָּדוֹל לְהִתְפַּלֵּל שְׁלֵא תֵאָרַע תְּקֻלָּה זֶה לְיִשְׂרָאֵל בְּחַיָּיו.

According to Rashi, the kohen gadol is partially responsible for the accidental murder. So the kohen gadol's death brings about some atonement or forgiveness from God. This makes it possible for the person who committed the accidental murder to be freed.



- ◆ Why should the kohen gadol be responsible for any accidental murder that took place while he was in office?
- ◆ What does this tell us about the responsibility our leaders have for what happens to the people they lead?



Abarbanel (Portugal, 500 years ago)

Because the kohen gadol was a great authority in Israel and holy to God. With his death all the people would be shaken up. Each living person would think about how short life is, and this would make people give up the idea of taking revenge for a family member's blood.

אברבנאל

לְפִי שֶׁהִכָּהוּ גָדוֹל הָיָה שֶׁר וְגָדוֹל
בְּיִשְׂרָאֵל וְקָדוֹשׁ לְאֵלֶיךָ וּבְמִוְתוֹ
כָּל הָעַם יִחְרָד וְהָיִי יָתוּ אֶל לְבוֹ
כִּי יָמֵי הָאָדָם כְּצֶלַע עוֹלָם וְלָמָּה לֹא
יִסִּיר מִרְעִיּוֹנָיו נִקְמַת דָּם קָרוֹבוֹ.

When someone close to us dies it can make us rethink our priorities and focus on what really matters in life. According to Abarbanel, the kohen gadol was deeply admired by the people. As their spiritual leader, he was as important to them as their own closest loved ones. So the death of the kohen gadol would have a huge impact on the entire nation. Every single person in Israel would feel the loss personally, and would be inspired to make changes to be better!

This would lead any potential go'el ha-dam to give up their desire for revenge. So, in this way, the death of the kohen gadol meant that accidental killers weren't in danger any more.

- ◆ Why do you think the death of the kohen gadol would have such a powerful impact on everybody? What does this tell you about the role of the kohen gadol? How can this apply to spiritual leaders today?
- ◆ Can you explain in your own words the difference between Rashi and Abarbanel's understandings of the kohen gadol's death?





רָמַע שֶׁל עִבְרִית • A Moment of Hebrew

Bemidbar 31:5

So a thousand from each tribe **were handed over** from the divisions of Israel, twelve thousand picked for the army campaign.

במדבר לא:ה

וַיִּמְסְרוּ מֵאֶלְפֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל אֶלֶף לַמָּטָה
שְׁנַיִם עָשָׂר אֶלֶף חֲלוּצֵי צָבָא:

לְמַסֵּר (שָׁרֵשׁ מ.ס.ר.)

- ◆ To transfer or deliver
- ◆ To pass
- ◆ To hand down (limsor)

= מְסֹרֶת
Tradition (what gets passed down) (masoret)

= מְסִירוֹת נֶפֶשׁ
Self-sacrifice, complete devotion (mesirut nefesh)

= מְסִירוֹת
The game of catch (mesirot)

Tradition!
TRADITION!



= מְסֵר
A message or idea, or the moral of the story (meser)

= מְסֵרוֹן
SMS, text message (mison)

Find the Word!

- ◆ This שָׁרֵשׁ (shoresh, root) appears in only one other place in the Torah, and it's also here in Bemidbar 31! Can you find it?
- ◆ The first mishnah in Pirkei Avot (Avot 1:1) is all about the transmission of the Torah. Can you look it up and find this שָׁרֵשׁ (shoresh, root) there?



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 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.**

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

haftarah: Yirmeyahu 2:4-28, 3:4

Good luck!



1 Who is described as being a כֹּהֵן (kohen, priest) to the army?

2 How much of the goods taken in war did the soldiers share with the rest of Benei Yisrael?

3 What do the leaders of Reuven and Gad agree to do with the rest of Benei Yisrael?

4 The names of two holidays appear in this aliyah. Which ones?



5 How should Eretz Yisrael be divided among the tribes?

6 Who shares a name with one of the בְּגָדֵי כֹהֲנָה (bigdei kehunah, items of clothing for priests)?

7 When can an accidental killer leave an עִיר מְקֻלָּט (ir miklat, city of refuge)?

8 When did Aharon die?

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

10 **From the haftarah:** When Benei Yisrael are sinning, who or what do they refer to as parents?



*
Look for the answers on page 11!



דְּקָה 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.



Agree!

- ◆ If you don't do what you say you'll do, you're a liar.
- ◆ How can people trust you if you go back on your word?
- ◆ נְדָרִים (nedarim, vows) are so serious that they are treated as an obligation like any other mitzvah in the Torah.
- ◆ It's so hard to cancel a neder (and sometimes impossible), and this shows that you're really supposed to always follow through.

Debate: You're never allowed to go back on your word.



Disagree!

- ◆ Sometimes circumstances change. You might have thought you'd be able to do something, but you were wrong. Or sometimes you buy something from the store and it's not what you thought it would be, so you return it.
- ◆ The Torah builds in ways to nullify nedarim sometimes. The Torah understands that you may not always be able to keep to what you said, and there has to be some flexibility.



בּוֹאוּ נְדַבֵּר עַל זֶה • Tell Me More About This!

The kohen gadol must have been a tremendous, precious, and beloved leader. According to Abarbanel, when a kohen gadol would die, everyone in Eretz Yisrael would rethink their priorities and make positive changes to become better people. That's quite an impact! (See פְּרָשְׁנוֹת /Commentary, p. 4.)

We no longer have a kohen gadol to look up to, but there are other kinds of spiritual leaders and teachers who can help guide us.



Pirkei Avot 1:6

הוֹשֵׁעַ בֶּן פְּרַחְיָה אוֹמֵר:
עֲשֵׂה לָךְ רֵב.

Yehoshua ben Perahiah
used to say: Appoint
for yourself a teacher.



Pirkei Avot 4:12

רַבִּי אֶלְעָזָר בֶּן שָׁמוּעַ אוֹמֵר: ...
וּמוֹרָא רַבָּד כְּמוֹרָא שְׁמַיִם.

R. Elazar ben Shamua says: ...Reverence for your
teacher should be like reverence for Heaven.



In school, you're usually assigned a teacher; you don't get to appoint your own. But Yeshoshua ben Perahiah is talking about finding yourself a teacher for life. He's telling us to work on forming relationships with people who can inspire us.

- ◆ What kind of teacher would you like to appoint for yourself? What are you looking for in a teacher for life?
- ◆ If you already have a teacher or spiritual leader that you admire, what role do they play in your life? Can you think of ways they help you be better?
- ◆ R. Elazar ben Shamua says that the way you relate to your teacher should be similar to the way you relate to God. It seems like your teacher could represent God to you. Does this idea surprise you? Why or why not?





הלכה • Halakhah



Learn one way
the parashah
practically impacts
our lives

Benei Yisrael capture a whole bunch of objects in their war with Midian. Elazar, the High Priest, tells them that any metal object that can withstand fire must be passed through fire, and everything else must pass through water (Bemidbar 31:21-23).

The Talmud (Avodah Zarah 75b) understands this to refer to two practices: 1) Using fire and heat to make things used for non-kosher food fit to use for kosher food, and 2) immersing or dipping metal objects used for food in water when a Jew acquires them for the first time.

The second practice is known as טְבִילַת כֵּלִים (tevilat keilim), and it was understood to apply not just to metal objects, but to glass ones as well. Here's how the Shulhan Arukh describes it:

Shulhan Arukh Yoreh Deah 120:1

When a Jew buys metal or glass vessels used to prepare or serve food from someone not Jewish...even if they are brand new, they must be immersed in a mikveh or a natural spring...

שולחן ערוך יורה דעה קכ:א

הַקּוֹנֵה מִהָעוֹבֵד כּוֹכְבִים כְּלֵי סְעוּדָה שֶׁל מִתְּכַת אוֹ שֶׁל זְכוּכִית...אִף עַל פִּי שֶׁהֵם חֲדָשִׁים צָרִיךְ לְהַטְבִּילָם בְּמִקְוֵה אוֹ מַעְיָן...

What's the idea here? It isn't about making the dishes kosher, because this rule is meant to apply even to dishes that have never been used before. The Talmud (Yerushalmi Avodah Zarah 5:15) says that it's supposed to teach us to create a kind of holiness for when we prepare and eat food!

So when bringing something from a non-Jewish space to a Jewish space, there is almost a kind of "sanctification" of the pots and pans that dedicates them for their use in a Jewish home.





Parashah Scavenger Hunt Answers:

1. Pinhas (31:6)
2. Half (31:27)
3. Conquer the land of Canaan (32:16-18)
4. Pesah (33:3) and Sukkot (33:4)
5. By lottery (33:54)
6. The chief of the tribe of Menashe was named Haniel ben Ephod; the ephod was a kind of apron worn by the כֹּהֵן גָּדוֹל (kohen gadol, high priest) (34:23)
7. When the kohen gadol dies (35:25)
8. The first day of the fifth month in the 40th year in the wilderness (33:38). The anniversary of this date always lands around when we read our parashah. This year, 1 Av (the fifth month) will be on Wednesday, July 15!
9. 42 (33:5-37,41-49)—Rashi points out that the first 14 stops take us just past Hazeret, 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!
10. Wood and rock (Yirmiyahu 2:27)

When doing tevilat keilim, there are a few rules to keep in mind (Shulhan Arukh Yoreh Deah 120):

- ◆ You have to go to a naturally collected body of water that is big enough to hold a person's body. Many communities have a mikveh especially for this purpose, but rivers, natural lakes, and seas are also great!
- ◆ Spring or ocean water can be moving, but lake and river water (unless they are connected to a spring) should be still.
- ◆ There is a special berakhah that is said right before immersing the objects:

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה ה' אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם
אֲשֶׁר קִדְּשָׁנוּ בְּמִצְוֹתָיו וְצִוָּנוּ עַל טְבִילַת כֵּלִים

Blessed are You, Lord our God, Ruler of the Universe,
Who has made us holy with Your mitzvot and
commanded us regarding tevilat keilim.

- ◆ All parts of the item need to come in contact with the water. So make sure water fills the spaces of the vessel, and either let go for a second when it's under the water, or lower it in a basket, or wet your hand before immersing the item.
- ◆ What does it mean to ensure that there is holiness in our kitchens, even when we are not doing a mitzvah like eating a Shabbat meal? How can holiness be part of any time we eat?





תּפִּילָה • Prayer in the Parashah

Our parashah lists all of Benei Yisrael's journeys through the wilderness. One part of their trip was from a place called Haradah to a place called Mak'helot (Bemidbar 33:25).

R. Yaakov ben Asher (Holy Roman Empire and Spain, 700 years ago) explains that the names of these two places are symbolic!

He says:

Haradah means "fear," and it represents the terror that Benei Yisrael experienced when the Egyptians were chasing after them.

Mak'helot is related to the Hebrew word for קהילות (kehillot, groups or communities). This place's name represents Benei Yisrael coming together in groups to sing songs (Tur Short Commentary Bemidbar 33:25).

In modern Hebrew, the word מַקְהֵלָה (mak'heilah) is the word for a choir, a group of singers!

According to this interpretation, the names of these two spots in the wilderness can tell us about an emotional journey that Benei Yisrael made from fear to confidence. This change was brought about through singing together.

- How can singing keep you from being afraid?
- What is the difference between singing by yourself and singing with a group?
- What parts of the prayer service do you like to sing with others? How does it make you feel?



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