בס"ד

7 FEBRUARY 2026 | 20 SHEVAT 5786 VOLUME 39 | #22

DAF HASHAVUA

יִתְרוֹ | YITRO

SHABBAT ENDS:

London: 5.49pm
Birmingham: 5.54pm
Bournemouth: 6.02pm
Cardiff: 6.05pm
Dublin: 6.10pm
Edinburgh: 5.54pm
Glasgow: 5.59pm
Hull: 5.51pm
Leeds: 5.50pm
Liverpool: 6.01pm
Manchester: 5.55pm
Nottingham: 5.55pm
Sheffield: 5.55pm
Southend: 5.46pm
Southport: 6.02pm
Jerusalem: 5.57pm

The United Synagogue

"The entire people saw the thunder and the flames, the sound of the shofar and the smoking mountain..." ***(Shemot 20:15)***

SIDRA BREAKDOWN

יִתְרוֹ
YITRO

5th Sidra in:
שְׁמוֹת
SHEMOT

By Numbers:
75 VERSES
1,105 WORDS
4,022 LETTERS

Headlines:
GIVING OF THE TORAH INCLUDING THE TEN COMMANDMENTS

YITRO:
Artscroll p.394
Hertz p.288
Koren Sacks p.485
Soncino p.445

HAFTARAH:
Artscroll p.1154
Hertz p.302
Koren Sacks p.1479
Soncino p.464

SIDRA SUMMARY

1ST ALIYA (KOHEN) – SHEMOT 18:1-12

Yitro, Moshe's (Moses) father-in-law and a Midianite priest, hears about the miraculous Exodus from Egypt. He comes to meet Moshe in the desert, together with his daughter Tziporah (Moshe's wife) and Moshe's two sons. Moshe greets Yitro and relates to him what has happened to the Israelites. Yitro and Moshe bring offerings.

Point to Consider: *What is the etymology of the name Yitro? (see Rashi to 18:1)*

2ND ALIYA (LEVI) – 18:13-23

According to Rashi's commentary, the narrative now skips forward to an incident after the giving of the Torah. Moshe is busy making halachic rulings from morning to evening. Concerned that this is too much for Moshe, Yitro advises him to set up an alternative system of judging the people, involving the appointment of a cascading system of judges. Only the major issues would be brought directly to Moshe for his judgement.

3RD ALIYA (SHLISHI) – 18:24-27

Moshe accepts Yitro's advice and appoints judges over sub-groups of 1000, 100, 50 and 10 people. Yitro returns to Midian.

4TH ALIYA (REVI'I) – 19:1-6

The narrative switches back to Rosh Chodesh Sivan, one and a half months after the Exodus, prior to the giving of the Torah. The people travel from Refidim and arrive in the Sinai Desert. Moshe ascends Mount Sinai. God tells Moshe to inform the people that if they listen to His voice and keep His covenant, they will become "a kingdom of priests and a holy nation".

5TH ALIYA (CHAMISHI) – 19:7-19:19

The people agree to God's offer. God tells Moshe to instruct the people to wash their clothing, refrain from marital relations (Rashi) and not to approach the mountain for the next three days. Moshe relays this to the nation. God's Presence descends onto the mountain; there is thunder, lightning and shofar blasts; the mountain is covered in smoke.

6TH ALIYA (SHISHI) – 19:20-20:14

God 'descends' upon Mount Sinai and Moshe ascends again. God once again tells Moshe to warn the people not to approach the mountain. After Moshe descends, God speaks the Ten Commandments:

1. Faith in God's existence
2. Prohibition of idol worship
3. Prohibition of taking God's Name in vain
4. Remembering Shabbat to keep it holy and refraining from 'work'
5. Honouring one's parents

You shall not:

6. Murder 7. Commit adultery
8. Steal 9. Bear false testimony
10. Covet what others have

7TH ALIYA (SHEVI'I) – 20:15-23

Trembling from this awesome experience, the people retreat and ask Moshe to be a go-between, instead of God speaking to them directly, lest they die. Moshe reassures them. God tells Moshe to warn the nation not to carve certain images (see Rashi). The commandment is given to build a designated altar upon which offerings to God should be brought.

HAFTARAH (YESHAYA 6:1-7:6 AND 9:5-6)

The prophet Yeshaya (Isaiah) sees a vision of the heavenly court, occupied by God and His angels. Whilst the angels assure Yeshaya that he is personally free of sin, God tells him to warn the people of their eventual exile, due to their stubbornness and iniquities. The evil king Achaz ascends the throne; he will be shown Divine mercy in order to save his righteous son, the future king Chizkiyahu.

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DID YOU HEAR THE NEWS?

BY: **RABBI ELI BIRNBAUM**
Stanmore & Canons Park Synagogue

"And Yitro, the Priest of Midian, father-in-law of Moshe, heard all that God had done for Moshe and for the Israelites – that God had taken the Israelites out of Egypt... And Yitro, Moshe's father-in-law came, with his (Moshe's) sons and wife, to Moshe toward the desert where he was encamped." (*Shemot* 18:1 and 5).

The Talmud (Tractate *Zevachim* 116a) asks: What did Yitro 'hear' that motivated him to leave his high office in Midian and join the Israelite camp? Three answers are recorded. According to Rabbi Yehoshua, he heard about the military victory over the Amalekites (*Shemot* 17:8-16). According to Rabbi Elazar of Modi'in, he heard about the giving of the Torah at Mount Sinai. And according to Rabbi Eliezer, he heard about the splitting of the Reed Sea.

On closer inspection, there appears to be an 'odd one out' in that list. Stacked up against the giving of the Torah and splitting of the sea, victory over the Amalekites comes across as a rather unimpressive, tepid suggestion. It is therefore surprising that Rabbi Yehoshua identifies it as Yitro's motivation par excellence. Were the events offered by his colleagues genuinely not inspiring enough?

Perhaps Rabbi Yehoshua seeks to take us through a paradigm shift in how we view moments of inspiration and motivation.

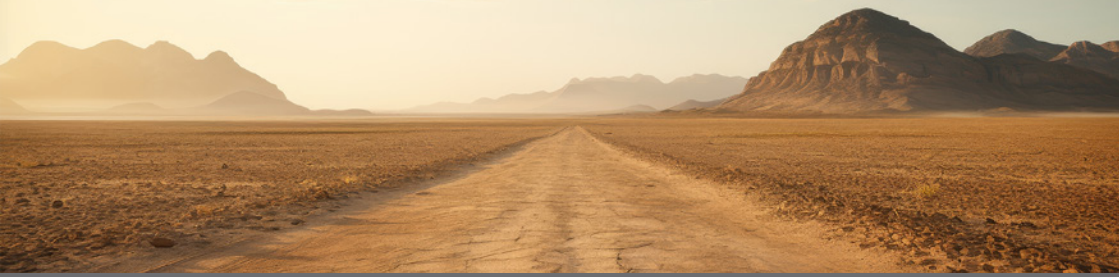
The war against the Amalekites is caused by a spiritual dilemma: "For the quarrel of the Children of Israel, and for their testing of God, questioning: 'Is God [really] in our midst, or not?'" (ibid. 17:7). By comparing this to the advice Yitro offers Moshe upon his arrival, a mirror image begins to form.

"And Yitro asked: 'Why is it that you do this, sitting alone [in judgement] while the people queue for advice and direction from dawn until dusk? And Moshe replied to his father-in-law: 'Because the nation comes to me to seek God'. And [Yitro] replied... if so, heed my advice, so that **God will be with you.**" (ibid. 18:14-19).

It may have been that the news of the splitting of the sea and giving of the Torah reached Yitro's ears and struck a chord of amazement and inspiration. But perhaps that wasn't what he was looking for. Instead, Yitro sought a **purpose** by which he could contribute to the fabric of the nascent nation.

It is here that the context of the war with Amalek is so important - it was triggered by the people feeling a lack of closeness to God. Yitro hears **this** and realises: this is a problem I can help solve. His advice to Moshe centres around the same point - if you want a repeat of Amalek, continue this system whereby the people must queue all day to achieve clarity in their spiritual dilemmas and feel close to God. You must expedite that process. Devolve your power and wisdom by establishing smaller courts of law, whose judges will become the glue of faith that binds this nation together as it takes its first tentative steps into the wilderness.

Yitro's journey can therefore be framed through a shift in our perspective: do we approach situations asking, 'How will this inspire and excite me?' or asking, 'What can I contribute here that will effect lasting change?'



In loving memory of Shmuel Nissim ben Yaacov z"l

TORAT CHAIM (THE LIVING TORAH) AND THE WOMEN'S BEIT MIDRASH

BY: **ARIELLA JOY**
Marriage Enhancement Programme (MEP) Manager and participant in the Women's Beit Midrash

There is a story that Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks zt"l loved to tell. *Imagine browsing in a library and noticing one book unlike any other. On its spine is written your family name. Intrigued, you open it and discover page after page written by many hands, in many languages. As you read, you realise that this book tells the story that each generation of your ancestors has told for the sake of the next, so that everyone born into the family would know where they came from, what shaped them, and the values by which they lived. On the very last page there is no entry, only a heading. It bears your name.*

Were I to find myself holding such a book, my life would already be changed. I could not read it as just another story, because it would be my story – a journey of self-discovery. Once I knew it existed, I could not put it back on the shelf and forget about it. I would understand that I am part of a long chain of people who have been travelling towards a shared destination for thousands of years, and that the journey remains unfinished, dependent on me to take the next steps (Radical Then, Radical Now, Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks, pp. 41–43, slightly paraphrased).

The Torah is often described as *Torat Chaim* – a living Torah. When people learn Torah, it comes alive. The stories of the past become relevant, shaping our present and guiding our future. We engage with the lives of those remarkable people who came before us so that we can be inspired and directed as we continue our own journey.

When the Torah was given at Mount Sinai, God instructs Moshe (Moses): "Thus shall you say to the house of Yaakov (Jacob) and tell the children of Israel" (Shemot 19:3). Rashi (1040-1105) explains that "the house of Yaakov" refers to the women, who were addressed first and were directly included in this defining moment.

Why were the women addressed first? Many commentaries explain that women play a crucial role in shaping the spiritual character of the home and community. Their understanding, commitment and values profoundly influence how Torah is lived day to day, and they are instrumental in moulding the character and outlook of future generations.

When women learn Torah, they deepen their connection to God and strengthen the spiritual foundations of their families and communities. Serious engagement with Jewish texts helps clarify personal values, identify areas for growth, and bring Torah into everyday life. Learning elevates the home, enriches conversation, deepens relationships, and fosters a life of thoughtful and genuine *avodat Hashem* (service of God).

The Chafetz Chaim (1838–1933), in *Likutei Halachot*, teaches that women should learn Torah - *Tanach* and ethical teachings - so that they can live with clarity, faith and commitment in a complex world. Torah learning, he taught, is not merely intellectual; it is a spiritual necessity.

> **"When women learn Torah, they deepen their connection to God and strengthen the spiritual foundations of their families and communities.**

Each Tuesday evening, an enthusiastic group of women gathers for the Women's Beit Midrash programme in North-West London. Guided by Rebbetzin Lauren Levin, we study a broad range of Jewish texts. Through *chavruta* learning and Lauren's inspiring *shiurim*, the texts are woven into a beautiful and meaningful tapestry. It is an absolute treat and, without doubt, the highlight of our week.

THE ANATOMY OF HEBREW - PART 5

DEATH IN HEBREW

BY: **RABBI DAVID LISTER**
Edgware United Synagogue

There can be few subjects more painful and threatening than death. Yet, as the Hebrew perspective on life brings warmth and meaning to human experience, so too does it soften our understanding of the end of life.

The most familiar Biblical Hebrew root for death is מות, *moot*, meaning "to die". It is linked to מוט (also pronounced *moot*), meaning to "falter" or "stumble," since, physically, this is what death entails: we falter on the path of life, stumble, and fall.

But the righteous among our ancestors used a different expression when contemplating their own death – to be "gathered into one's people." We see this in Yaakov's (Jacob's) final instructions to his children (*Bereishit* 49:29): "I am being gathered in to my people; bury me with my ancestors." The meaning is clear. When people pass away, they do not simply decompose and vanish. They endure beyond memory, social impact and gravestones. There is a next world where they rest in fellowship with those who went before, and when we die, we too are gathered into their company.

Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch (1808-1888) points out that אסף (*asaf*), the Hebrew root for gathering in, has happy connotations.

In Isaiah 11:12, it describes the joyful ingathering of the Jewish people from exile:

"[God] will raise a banner for the nations, and He will gather in the banished people of Israel. And He will collect the scattered people of Judah from the four corners of the earth."

In *Bemidbar* 12:14–15, the same root appears in the context of atonement. Miriam spoke disrespectfully about Moshe (Moses) and was punished with *tzara'at*, a skin affliction that required temporary banishment from the camp. Once the affliction ended, her sin was expiated, and she returned to the affectionate company of her friends and family. The text notes: "...Let her be closed outside the camp for seven days, and after that she will be gathered in."

The root אסף (*asaf*) also appears in a familiar Biblical context: gathering in the harvest. In *Devarim* 11:14, a verse from the second paragraph of the *Shema*, we read: "And I will give the rain of your land in its time... and you will gather in your grain, your wine and your oil."

Bringing these ideas together, we see what God's gathering in signifies at the end of life. Like the ingathering of exiles, it is a wondrous homecoming to a holy new life. Like the ingathering of Miriam, it is a time of atonement and reconciliation. Like the ingathering of the harvest, it is a time of satisfaction and celebration for a lifetime's spiritual accomplishments – a time of rest, happiness and peace.

“ When people pass away, they do not simply decompose and vanish. They endure beyond memory, social impact and gravestones. There is a next world where they rest in fellowship with those who went before, and when we die, we too are gathered into their company.

THE CREATION OF THE MODERN CHIEF RABBINATE - PART 1

CHIEF RABBI DR J.H. HERTZ (1872-1946)

BY: **RABBI MICHAEL LAITNER**
US Director of Education, Interim rabbi at Belmont US

Eighty years ago this January, months after the end of World War Two, British Jewry lost Chief Rabbi Dr Joseph Herman Hertz, whose yahrzeit is on 12 Shevat. His long tenure, 1913-1946, shaped the development of the Chief Rabbinate from spiritual leadership of United Synagogue and sister communities to an office with broader, deeper influence, and representation domestically and internationally.

Upon Rabbi Hertz's passing, aside from widespread mourning within the Jewish community, Prime Minister Clement Atlee cabled the following to the United Synagogue:

"I wish to convey to you on behalf of His Majesty's government and of myself personally heartfelt condolences on the loss sustained by the death of the Chief Rabbi", recognising his service to both the Jewish community and the nation.

Similar messages arrived from other non-Jewish politicians and clergy domestically and internationally, including Foreign Secretary Ernest Bevin.

Chief Rabbi Dr Joseph Herman Hertz. Courtesy of www.thejc.com

Although Bevin was later to gain notoriety in the Jewish community for his conduct before and after the foundation of the State of Israel in 1948, he wrote that Rabbi Hertz would not just be missed by, *"Jewry, whom he so faithfully served, but by millions of other religious persuasions for whose liberty he strove so hard. We shall miss his wise counsel which he was always ready to give freely to His Majesty's Government."*

What prompted such an outpouring?

Born in 1872 in Slovakia, Rabbi Hertz immigrated to New York, where he was educated and gained *semicha* (ordination) before taking pulpits in Syracuse and, crucially, Johannesburg, in 1898, where he came to the attention of British authorities through his courageous and principled stand in favour of Britain during the Second Boer War. This early indication of his leadership and visionary talents also gave him an exit route from South Africa when Boer authorities wished to deport him, to Manhattan's Orach Chaim Synagogue in 1911.

With the passing of UK Chief Rabbi Dr Hermann Adler that same year, Rabbi Hertz immediately became a leading and ultimately successful candidate for the Chief Rabbinate in London, arriving in 1913. He was seen as capable of unifying a community expanding numerically, culturally and religiously due to immigration.

He was also to prove a fiercely independent, energetic leader to both Jewry and beyond, with a prodigious literary output, of which his edition of the Chumash was but one example.

His installation sermon on 14 April that year outlined an ambitious and inspiring vision to teach, interpret, champion and defend Jews and Judaism to create peace, both with others and finding harmony between Judaism and the challenges of the time.

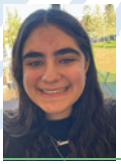
His fiery oratory was direct and clear, illustrated by this brief extract. *"Only a religious Israel (i.e. the Jewish People) is a great dynamic power for personal holiness, social righteousness and humanitarian endeavour. Only a religious Israel is a nation asset of infinite value to the State whose citizens we are."*

Nobody was to foresee that, less than 18 months later, Britain and the Empire would be plunged into what would become World War One, with profound consequences which still affect us to this day.

Faced with challenges that neither his predecessors nor successors would encounter, Rabbi Hertz threw himself into the fray during the war, the crises of the 1920s and 30s, the advancement of Zionism, and ultimately World War Two. As a result, by 1946 when he passed away in office, he had moulded the modern Chief Rabbinate into the model we are familiar with today.

THE TRIBE WEEKLY
PARASHAT YITRO
6-7 FEBRUARY | 20 SHEVAT

DECODING UNEXPECTED RELATIONSHIPS



BY: **NATANA SABEL**

Tribe Madricha

This week's *parasha* begins with Moshe (Moses) greeting Yitro (his Midianite father-in-law). The Torah states that "Moshe went out to greet his father-in-law. He (Moshe) bowed down to him (Yitro)" (*Shemot* 18:7). As expected from Moshe, he approaches Yitro in a respectful and humble manner. Yitro was a convert and previously would have had different beliefs and varying customs, but he is still able to connect with Moshe and share his wisdom. Yitro explains to Moshe that he should set up a system of judges to ease the burden of sitting alone as a judge and Moshe does so without hesitation.

When God begins to declare the 10 Commandments, the Jewish people proclaim that the revelation is too intense and that they cannot cope. They request that, instead of God reciting the final 8 commandments, Moshe conveys them. Being tasked to relay such important laws that the whole of our people will live by must have been extremely daunting to Moshe. Perhaps Yitro's encouragement to Moshe to set up a system of judges allowed Moshe to prepare himself and focus on his own spiritual needs so that he could serve as a messenger.

It is our job in this world to help everyone live up to their most righteous selves, but whilst helping others, it is vital that we look after ourselves, so that we can have the most positive impact on those around us. Yitro clearly had high levels of wisdom and his outlook influenced Moshe so that he could serve the Jewish people in the most beneficial way possible. Relationships with those that surround us can be key foundations and can provide guidance for troubling times. It is important that we strive to nurture these relationships and to be the best version of ourselves.

Parasha Wordsearch

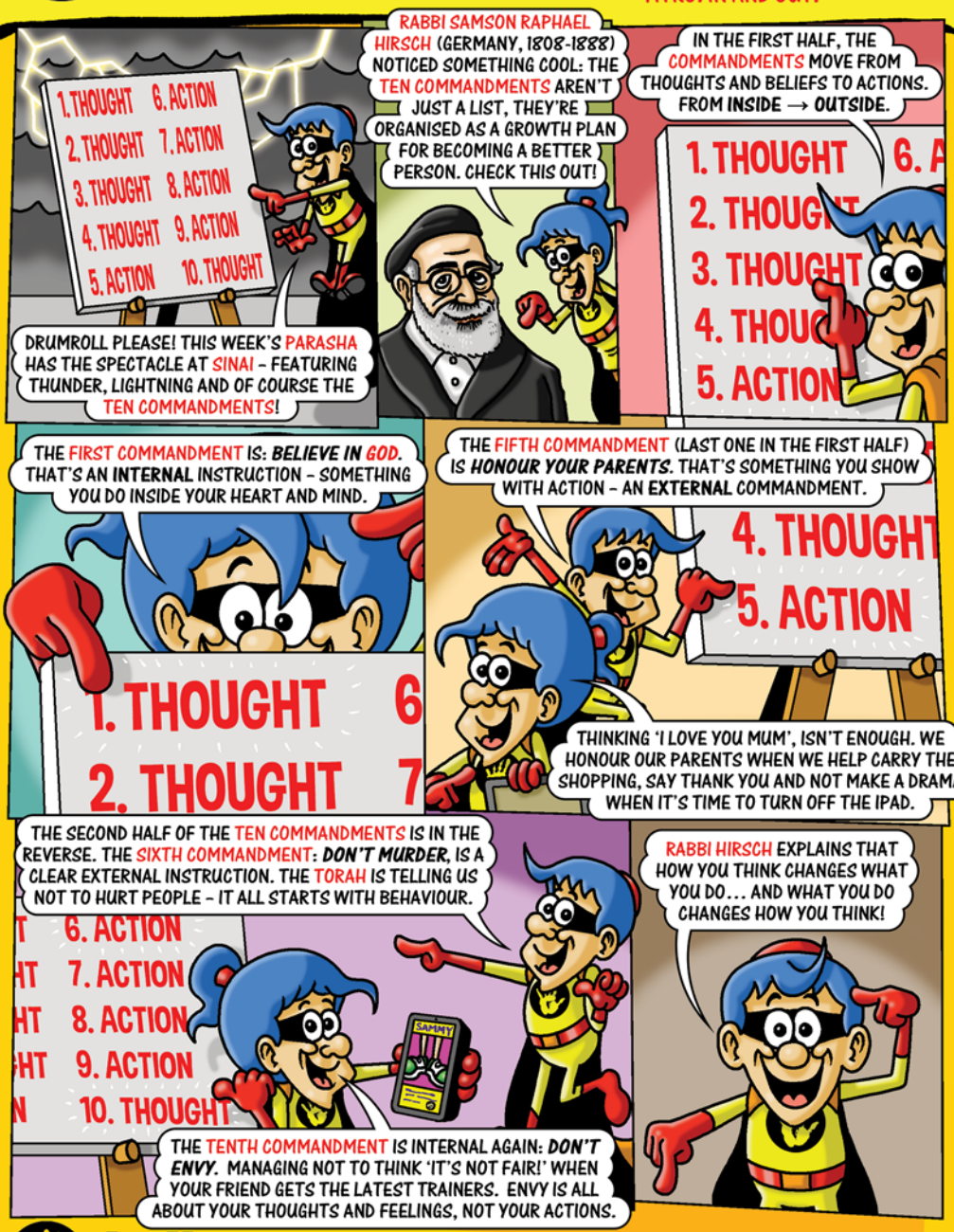
Find these words in the grid. The words can go in any direction and can share letters as they cross over each other.

Y	C	E	T	A	R	T	S	I	G	A	M	P
N	E	T	I	N	A	I	D	I	M	X	V	Y
C	O	M	M	U	N	I	T	Y	E	R	Z	G
M	M	I	T	E	H	B	Z	V	P	I	B	P
A	E	U	T	R	H	H	Z	B	W	G	N	I
Q	S	C	W	A	E	S	E	D	B	H	J	J
S	S	C	B	I	L	V	A	H	D	T	Z	L
I	E	W	J	Q	S	E	N	H	S	E	L	P
K	N	G	T	Y	J	D	V	O	F	O	W	A
R	G	U	D	B	D	W	O	E	C	U	M	N
W	E	F	R	U	V	I	V	M	R	S	N	A
M	R	E	H	O	J	V	Y	I	T	R	O	B
H	N	A	A	R	H	O	A	R	A	H	P	M

COMMUNITY
JUDGES
MIDIANITE
RIGHTEOUS
CONVERT
MAGISTRATE
MOSHE
WISDOM
HASHEM
MESSENGER
REVELATION
YITRO

THE TRIBE SCRIBE

YITRO: IN AND OUT!



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Tribe is the Young People's Department of the United Synagogue: Creating a future for our community through engaging, educating and inspiring the next generation.