

# DAF HASHAVUA

## בְּמִדְבָּר | BEMIDBAR

### SHABBAT ENDS:

London: 9.46pm  
 Birmingham: 9.58pm  
 Bournemouth: 9.54pm  
 Cardiff: 10.04pm  
 Dublin: 10.21pm  
 Edinburgh: 10.31pm  
 Glasgow: 10.38pm  
 Hull: 10.10pm  
 Leeds: 10.06pm  
 Liverpool: 10.16pm  
 Manchester: 10.10pm  
 Nottingham: 10.06pm  
 Sheffield: 10.11pm  
 Southend: 9.41pm  
 Southport: 10.19pm  
 Jerusalem: 8.10pm

### Shabbat Mevarechim

**Rosh Chodesh Sivan is  
on Sunday**

**Shavuot begins on  
Thursday night**

*Eruv Tavshilin*

*"God spoke to Moshe in the  
Sinai Desert ..."*  
**(Bemidbar 1:1)**



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## SIDRA BREAKDOWN

### בְּמִדְבָּר BEMIDBAR

1st Sidra in:

### בְּמִדְבָּר BEMIDBAR

By Numbers:

**159 VERSES**  
**1,823 WORDS**  
**7,393 LETTERS**

Headlines:  
**FORMATION OF  
THE JEWISH CAMP  
IN THE DESERT**

#### BEMIDBAR:

Artscroll p.726  
Hertz p.568  
Koren Sacks p.865  
Soncino p.793

#### HAFTARAH

(MACHAR CHODESH):

Artscroll p.1207  
Hertz p.948  
Koren Sacks p.1645  
Soncino p.1189

## SIDRA SUMMARY

### 1ST ALIYA (KOHEN) – BEMIDBAR 1:1-19

On Rosh Chodesh of the second month after the Exodus from Egypt, God instructs Moshe and Aharon to take a census of men above the age of 20. (The Talmud adds that men above 60 were not counted). The leader of each tribe is to be present when his tribe is counted. The name of each leader is stated. The census is carried out as commanded.

### 2ND ALIYA (LEVI) – 1:20-54

The Torah lists the results of the census. The tribe of Reuven numbers 46,500; Shimon 59,300; Gad 45,650; Yehuda 74,600; Yissachar 54,400; Zevulun 57,400; Ephraim 40,500; Menashe 32,200; Binyamin 35,400; Dan 62,700; Asher 41,500; Naftali 53,400. This comes to a total of 603,550 men. The tribe of Levi is not counted with the rest of the tribes. They are assigned to dismantle and transport the *Mishkan* (Tabernacle) when the nation travels in the desert, as well as to guard the *Mishkan* when it is stationary.

### 3RD ALIYA (SHLISHI) – 2:1-34

God tells Moshe and Aharon how to position the 12 tribes (other than Levi) around the *Mishkan*. They are to be organised into four groups of three tribes, each group led by one particular tribe. To the east of the *Mishkan* are the tribes of Yehuda, Yissachar and Zevulun, led by Yehuda. To the south are the tribes of Reuven, Shimon and Gad, led by Reuven. To the west are the tribes of Ephraim, Menashe and Binyamin, led by Ephraim. To the north are the tribes of Dan, Asher and Naftali, led by Dan.

### 4TH ALIYA (REVI'IL) – 3:1-13

Aharon's sons are listed. God tells Moshe to bring the tribe of Levi to Aharon in order to assist him in his work as the *Kohen Gadol* (High Priest).

The tribe of Levi is to take over the role that had been designated for the firstborn, who were sanctified on the night of the Exodus from Egypt, when the Egyptian firstborn were killed and they survived.

### 5TH ALIYA (CHAMISHI) – 3:14-39

God tells Moshe to count the men of the tribe of Levi, aged from one month upwards. The count is divided up into three main groups, according to the descendants of Levi's three sons, Gershon, Kehat and Merari. Each main group, whose constituent families are also listed, is given a different location in relation to the *Mishkan*. The overall number of Levi'im counted in the census is 22,000.

### 6TH ALIYA (SHISHI) – 3:40-51

Moshe is told to count the male firstborn and to 'replace' them with the Levi'im. The firstborn number 22,273. The extra 273 firstborn (over and above the 22,000 Levi'im) are to give five shekels each in order to redeem their status.

### 7TH ALIYA (SHEVI'IL) – 4:1-19

The specific role of each of the three main families is now detailed, one in this week's sidra, two in next week's sidra. The family of Kehat are to take down, transport and reassemble the holy Ark (*Aron*), the Table (*Shulchan*), the Menorah, the Golden Altar (*Mizbeach Ha'zahav*) and the vessels used together with these features of the *Mishkan*.

### HAFTARAH (MACHAR CHODESH - I SHMUEL 20:18-42)

The haftarah is the special reading for Shabbat Erev Rosh Chodesh, from the Book of Shmuel (Samuel). It relates how Yehonatan (Jonathan) risked his life to protect his friend David (later to be King David) from the wrath of Yehonatan's father, King Shaul (Saul). Their initial discussion of how to ensure David's safety took place on Erev Rosh Chodesh, the day before Shaul's special feast.



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**Editor-in-Chief:** Rabbi Baruch Davis

**Editorial and Production Team:**

Rabbi Daniel Sturgess  
Rebetzen Nechama Davis  
Laurie Maurer  
Jennifer Dorling

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# THE WEIGHT OF DIGNITY IS NEVER TOO HEAVY

BY: **REBBETZEN EVA CHAPPER**

Borehamwood and Elstree United Synagogue

At first glance, a census might seem bureaucratic - a mere counting of numbers. A leader who appears focused on how many followers they have may seem populist, and organising people along tribal lines could feel divisive. Yet this is exactly how the book of *Bemidbar* begins.

Moshe (Moses) conducts a census, counting each man from twenty years old and upward, and organises the Israelites into tribes, assigning each group a specific location and responsibility around the *Mishkan* (Tabernacle). On the surface, it may seem like meticulous administration, but a deeper reading reveals profound lessons. Rashi (1040-1105) explains that the census is a way to honour each person, acknowledging their individual worth and contribution to the community. From this, we learn that every individual is significant, each has a role in the larger community, and that stability and structure are essential in times of transition or difficulty.

Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch (1808-1888) notes that the choice of the wilderness as the place for this census could have been neither economic nor political, because such concerns have no relevance in the wilderness. A census of this nature makes it clear that

a community cannot exist as an abstract idea but only has true meaning in terms of the totality of its components. At the same time, each member of the community is made aware that they personally "count" as an important constituent of this totality, and that the task to be performed by the nation as a whole requires every one of its members to remain true to their duty and properly devoted to the shared vocation.

The embodiment of these principles can be seen in the incredible work of Paperweight, a charity that provides personalised guidance to people overwhelmed by financial, bureaucratic, and life-changing challenges. Like the Israelites in the wilderness, many face complex journeys through life, encountering obstacles that feel insurmountable. Paperweight's holistic approach mirrors the Torah's model of caring for each member: they provide one-on-one support, listening carefully to each person's unique situation, and creating tailored solutions.

They bring order to chaotic circumstances - whether negotiating debt repayment, or suffering financial challenges caused by bereavement, family breakdown or redundancy. Just as Moshe ensured that each tribe had its place and

**“ From this, we learn that every individual is significant, each has a role in the larger community, and that stability and structure are essential in times of transition or difficulty.**

function, Paperweight ensures that individuals receive practical support and guidance, helping to navigate their rights and options and giving them the confidence to regain control over their lives.

Small acts of attention, care and guidance can transform lives, turning moments of confusion or difficulty into opportunities for stability, dignity and growth. In both the wilderness of the desert and the complexities of modern life, every individual counts and every act of support has lasting impact.





# FATHER OF MERCY

BY: **DAYAN IVAN BINSTOCK**

London Beth Din

This Shabbat we will recite an additional prayer before *Ashrei* called *Av HaRachamim* - "Father of Mercy." Its origins lie in the aftermath of the First Crusade in 1096. Many Jewish communities in Germany were decimated as mobs found an outlet for their religious zeal in attacking Jews before continuing on to the Holy Land. Thousands of men, women and children were killed in the Rhineland communities of Mainz, Worms and Speyer over the course of just a few weeks.

Most of the violence of the First Crusade took place during the spring months, corresponding to Nisan, Iyar and Sivan. The martyrs were commemorated in volumes known as *Memorbücher* (Books of Remembrance), in which they were recorded alongside prominent leaders of the community. Their names were introduced with the phrase *Yizkor Elohim* - "May God remember." In time, this formulation became the opening of the *Yizkor* memorial prayer that we recite today on Yom Kippur and the festivals.

Out of this practice, an anonymous author composed a communal memorial prayer, *Av HaRachamim*, to be recited alongside the naming of the martyrs. The prayer speaks of those who died *al kiddush HaShem*, sanctifying God's Name. They are described as being "lighter than eagles and

stronger than lions." The earliest reference to the prayer appears in the writings of Rabbi Ephraim of Bonn (1132-1197). Originally, it was recited on the Shabbatot between Pesach and Shavuot, when the massacres had taken place. The text includes a plea for the avenging of innocent blood - yet, as the late Chief Rabbi Hertz (1872-1946) notes in his commentary, "Vengeance was prayed for - and left to God."

In the mid-fourteenth century, as the Black Death swept across Europe and decimated vast swathes of the population, Jews were frequently scapegoated, accused of causing the plague, and subjected to further waves of persecution and killing. Many more names were added to the memorial lists, and *Av HaRachamim* came to be recited on additional Shabbatot.

Two main customs developed: to recite *Av HaRachamim* on most Shabbatot of the year, omitting it only on occasions of heightened joy; or to recite it only twice annually - on the Shabbat before Shavuot, marking the culmination of the First Crusade persecutions, and on the Shabbat before Tisha B'Av, recalling the tragedies associated with the Black Death. The latter is the custom followed in the United Synagogue. Accordingly,

**“ We look forward, in the concluding words of *Av HaRachamim*, to a time of “*Al Ken Yarim Rosh* – he will hold his head up high” when all decent people will be able to live in peace and security, with dignity and hope.**

today, following the personal memorial prayers, *Av HaRachamim* (p. 426) will be recited.

This prayer takes on renewed poignancy as we reflect on the events of October 7th and the aftermath. Our prayers encompass our concern for all innocent people, wherever they may be. As we mourn the tragic loss of life of our martyrs centuries ago, we look forward, in the concluding words of *Av HaRachamim*, to a time of "*Al Ken Yarim Rosh* – he will hold his head up high" when all decent people will be able to live in peace and security, with dignity and hope.





# THE COMMENTATORS: RAMBAN

BY: **SHIRA JACKSON**  
US Education



The Ramban was a halachist, physician, communal leader, and one of the great biblical exegetes of all time. His Torah commentary is a masterful blend of *peshat* (plain meaning), *midrash* (deeper meaning), *halacha* (law), and the emerging mystical tradition that would later be called Kabbalah. But Ramban was not only a scholar of texts; he was a scholar of life. His commentary is deeply shaped by the dramatic events he lived through—events that left him wandering, then rebuilding, in the ruins of Jewish history.

The turning point of Ramban's life came in 1263, when King James I of Aragon compelled him to participate in the Barcelona Disputation against Pablo Christiani, a Jewish convert to Christianity. Ramban defended Judaism with brilliance and courage, refusing to concede theological ground even under threat. Although the king praised his performance, the Church did not. Within months, Ramban was forced to flee Spain under threat of death. He left behind his family, community and the land of his birth, becoming a wandering exile.

His exile eventually brought him to the Land of Israel, where he found Jerusalem desolate - "a city laid waste," as he wrote in a famous letter. Despite its devastation, he managed to re establish a Jewish community, founded a synagogue, and poured his energy into rebuilding Jewish life. Ramban's

personal journey - from rootedness to wandering, from loss to rebuilding - echoes powerfully in his commentary on *Parashat Bemidbar*.

When Ramban turns to the opening chapters of *Bemidbar*, he pays close attention to the arrangement of the tribes around the *Mishkan* (Tabernacle) (2:2). For him, this is not merely logistical. It is a spiritual map: God dwelling among a wandering people, sanctifying their journey not only in times of triumph but even in times of vulnerability, in the barren desert. This is the voice of a man who himself wandered. Ramban knew what it meant to lose home, to travel through uncertainty, and yet to feel that God's presence could still be found - sometimes more intensely - in the wilderness. His commentary reads the desert not as a place of abandonment but as a place of encounter (1:1). The *Mishkan* at the centre of the camp mirrors the way Ramban experienced divine closeness, in the very places where Jewish life seemed most fragile.

Ramban also explains that the census in *Bemidbar* is not bureaucratic but affectionate; God instructs Moshe to count the people the way one counts precious treasures (1:45). Each individual matters. Each soul is seen. This sensitivity reflects Ramban's pastoral heart. Throughout his life he served as a communal leader,

“ Ramban's commentary on *Bemidbar* is inseparable from his own story. A man who wandered reads the wilderness as holy. A man who rebuilt community reads the census as love.

comforting, guiding and advocating for his people. After the Disputation, when Jewish morale was shaken, Ramban's writings consistently emphasised dignity, worth and divine care. His reading of the census reflects the worldview of a leader who understood how deeply people need to feel counted, valued and held by God.

Ramban's commentary on *Bemidbar* is inseparable from his own story. A man who wandered reads the wilderness as holy. A man who rebuilt community reads the census as love. Through his eyes, *Bemidbar* becomes not only the story of our national journey, but the story of every individual Jew who may have lost their home but retained their hope, as they continue to search for God.

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# THE TRIBE WEEKLY



BEMIDBAR

15-16 MAY | 29 IYAR

## THE LEVI'IM: NOT IN THE ARMY, STILL HEROES



BY: **GABRIEL SOLLER**

Tribe gap year student

When we start *Parashat Bemidbar*, God tells Moshe (Moses) to count the Jewish men old enough to go to war. Tribe after tribe gets counted... and then suddenly the Torah says, "*Except Levi.*"

At this point you might be thinking: why didn't they have to fight?

Rashi (1040-1105) explains that the firstborns were supposed to serve in the *Mishkan* (portable Sanctuary), but after the sin of the Golden Calf,

they lost that privilege. The Levi'im didn't sin. They stayed loyal when it counted and earned a different responsibility, guarding and serving in the *Mishkan*. They didn't dodge responsibility; they just had a different, constant role.

The Rambam (1138-1204) adds that the Levi'im were set aside to live lives focused on Torah, values and purpose. They didn't chase land or wealth, their job was to keep the nation spiritually grounded. And he says anyone can be like the Levi'im if they dedicate themselves to a life of purpose and meaning. It's about choices, not birth.

Here's the sports version: imagine a football team where everyone wants to be striker.

No one defends, no one keeps goal, and no one wants to be the manager getting blamed. That team would be chaos. The Levi'im are like the keeper or manager. They're not scoring goals or getting cheers, but without them, the whole team falls apart. Different roles, same importance.

The message for real life is that not everyone gets the flashy role. Some people quietly keep things steady, do the right thing, or stand up for values when it's awkward. Being important doesn't always look impressive.

So next time you think you're 'just' the quiet one, remember: even the Levi'im didn't score the goals, but they held up the whole nation.

### 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.

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

- COUNT
- DRAFTED
- PRIVILEGE
- LEVIIM
- FIRSTBORNS
- RESPONSIBILITY
- SPIRITUAL
- ISRAEL
- VALUES
- TRIBE
- FOOTBALL
- MOSHE
- MANAGER
- MEN
- NATION
- WAR
- RAMBAM
- GOALS
- MISHKAN
- CALF
- TORAH
- RASHI





# THE TRIBE SCRIBE

BEMIDBAR: CENTRE SPOT!

## TRAVEL AGENT

CHECK OUT THESE CITY POSTERS! THEY ALWAYS PUT THE MOST IMPORTANT PLACE TO VISIT IN A CITY, RIGHT IN THE MIDDLE - 'YOU HAVE TO SEE THIS!'



THIS WEEK'S PARASHA OF BEMIDBAR SHOWS US THAT IT WAS THE SAME FOR THE JEWISH PEOPLE IN THE DESERT. ALL THE TRIBES CAMPED IN GROUPS, EACH TRIBE WITH ITS OWN FLAG AND PLACE, BUT THEY ALL CENTRED AROUND ONE ICONIC THING: THE MISHKAN (TABERNACLE).

AND RIGHT AT THE HEART OF THE MISHKAN WAS THE TORAH!

IT'S LIKE A GIANT TARGET.



BUT IF EVERYONE'S FOCUSED ON ONE THING - WON'T WE ALL END UP THE SAME?

NOPE, NOT AT ALL! EVERY TRIBE WAS UNIQUE; WITH THEIR OWN FLAG, OWN STRENGTHS, OWN JOB, OWN IDENTITY.

The Tribe of Zevulun were the traders, Yissachar were the Torah learners, Yehuda were the leaders. Basically: business, books and bosses! Different jobs, united at one shared centre.

IT'S LIKE A FOOTBALL TEAM - STRIKERS, DEFENDERS, GOALIE - DIFFERENT ROLES, SAME GOAL.



WHEN EVERYONE PLAYS THEIR PART, AND KEEPS THEIR EYE ON THE GOAL, THE WHOLE TEAM WINS.

WHAT'S AT THE CENTRE OF YOUR LIFE?

YOU DON'T HAVE TO BE THE SAME. JUST MAKE SURE YOU'RE AIMING AT THE RIGHT TARGET!



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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.