

25 JULY 2026 | 11 AV 5786

VOLUME 39 | #47

# DAF HASHAVUA

ואתחנן | VA'ETCHANAN

## SHABBAT ENDS:

London: 9.58pm  
 Birmingham: 10.10pm  
 Bournemouth: 10.06pm  
 Cardiff: 10.16pm  
 Dublin: 10.34pm  
 Edinburgh: 10.45pm  
 Glasgow: 10.51pm  
 Hull: 10.22pm  
 Leeds: 10.18pm  
 Liverpool: 10.29pm  
 Manchester: 10.23pm  
 Nottingham: 10.18pm  
 Sheffield: 10.23pm  
 Southend: 9.54pm  
 Southport: 10.32pm  
 Jerusalem: 8.22pm

## Shabbat Nachamu

**Tu B'Av is on Wednesday**



*"Write [these words] on the doorposts of your house and on your gates"*  
**(Devarim 6:9)**

SIDRA  
BREAKDOWN

ואתחנן  
VA'ETCHANAN

2nd Sidra in:  
דברים  
DEVARIM

By Numbers:  
122 VERSES  
1,878 WORDS  
7,343 LETTERS

Headlines:  
HISTORY; THE  
SHEMA; THE TEN  
COMMANDMENTS

VA'ETCHANAN:  
Artscroll p.958  
Hertz p.755  
Koren Sacks p.1159  
Soncino p.1008

HAFTARAH:  
Artscroll p.1196  
Hertz p.776  
Koren Sacks p.1599  
Soncino p.1028

SIDRA SUMMARY

1ST ALIYA (KOHEN) – DEVARIM 3:23-4:4

Moshe (Moses) recalls that after defeating Sichon and Og in battle (see *Devarim* 2:31-3:11), he prayed to be allowed to enter the Land of Cana'an (see Rashi). God refused Moshe's request, allowing him only to see the Land from afar. Moshe tells the people to observe the mitzvot, which will allow them to inherit the Land and he reminds them of the punishments they witnessed when the nation strayed after the idol of Pe'or (see *Bemidbar* 25:3).

**Point to Consider:** *What is an example of the prohibition of "not adding to the words" of the Torah? (see Rashi to 4:2)*

2ND ALIYA (LEVI) – 4:5-40

Moshe tells the people that studying Torah and keeping the mitzvot will raise their stature in the eyes of the other nations. He warns them not to forget the historic revelation at Mount Sinai, in which God Himself spoke the Ten Commandments from the midst of the fire. Moshe adds that they must not make any idols, and warns them against worshipping the sun, the moon or the stars. He warns them that failure to heed this will result in exile from the Land. However, God will never abandon His nation; they will always be able to return to Him.

3RD ALIYA (SHLISHI) – 4:41-49

Moshe sets aside three cities to the east of the Jordan River. These cities are to provide refuge for a person who has killed accidentally and is fleeing from the relatives of the deceased.

4TH ALIYA (REVI'I) – 5:1-18

Moshe again stresses that the people stood "face to face" with God at the time of the giving of the Torah at Mount Sinai. Moshe recalls 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 'melacha' (creative labours)
5. Honouring one's parents
6. You shall not murder
7. You shall not commit adultery
8. You shall not steal
9. You shall not bear false testimony
10. You shall not covet what others have

5TH ALIYA (CHAMISHI) – 5:19-6:3

Moshe recalls that the heads of the tribes and the elders asked him to relay God's commandments to them; they feared they would die if they continued to hear the commandments directly from God. God agreed to their request.

6TH ALIYA (SHISHI) – 6:4-25

The paragraph of *Shema Yisrael* is stated, in which the Jewish people are enjoined to believe in the Oneness of God, to love Him, to teach Torah, to wear tefilin and to affix *mezuzot* to their doorposts. Moshe warns the people not to allow the material attractions of the Land to cause them to neglect their service of God, nor to test Him like they did in the desert.

7TH ALIYA (SHEVI'I) – 7:1-11

When the Israelites come into the Land of Cana'an, they will successfully overcome seven great and mighty nations. Moshe warns them not to enter into a covenant with these nations, nor to intermarry with them. Israel is God's chosen nation, whom He lovingly brought out of Egypt.

HAFTARAH NACHAMU (YESHAYA 40:1-26)

Taken from the book of Yeshaya, this is the first of the seven 'haftarot of consolation' read after Tisha B'Av. It starts with God's instruction to the prophets to "Comfort, comfort My people" (*Nachamu, nachamu, ami*) and goes on to prophesy that God will return to Jerusalem and bring an end to the exile.



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# A CHILD'S LETTERS; FROM CAIRO TO CAMBRIDGE

BY: **RABBI DOVI LEBRETT**

Shenley United Jewish Community

I am writing this *Dvar Torah* having recently returned from a Shenley community trip to the Cambridge University Library, where 200,000 Cairo *Genizah* documents are preserved.

This *Genizah*, meaning "hidden away", was a vast collection of discarded Jewish writings, some well over a thousand years old. Torah fragments, letters, contracts, business records and everyday scraps were stored in the attic of the *Ben Ezra* Synagogue in Cairo, often because they contained the Divine Name. Over time, this storehouse became an unintended archive of Jewish life.

For many on the trip, the experience was unexpectedly emotional. Some were struck by documents connected to *Rambam* (Maimonides, 1138-1204), including tear-soaked letters reflecting the devastating loss of his brother David. There were also deeply human records: documents revealing poverty, slavery and the complexity of daily life in Jewish communities of the time.

But the moment that stayed with me was different.

I found myself watching my daughter trying to read a small fragment. A child, living centuries ago in Egypt, had written parts of the *alef-bet* as a writing exercise. The letters were uneven: some oversized, some barely formed. Alongside the writing were drawings – what might be a

camel (though it looked more like a robot), a menorah, and a few doodles.

There was no name attached to the fragment. We do not know who the child was or who taught them, or what became of them. Yet in that moment my daughter was sounding out the same letters that another Jewish child had once struggled to form. The distance of centuries collapsed.

The *Genizah* contains many famous and important manuscripts. But those manuscripts are not the mechanism of Jewish continuity. They are its outcome. Before there can be great texts, there must be readers. Before there can be a thriving Jewish community, there must be children painstakingly learning the *alef-bet*.

In *Parashat Va'etchanan*, we read the words of the *Shema*. Embedded within it is one of the central mitzvot of Jewish life:

"*Ve'shinantam levanecha*" – "You shall teach them [the Torah] to your children."

The Torah places education at the heart of our daily declaration of faith. Twice a day, as we affirm our belief in God, we are reminded that Jewish life and learning must be taught and transmitted.

That small *Genizah* fragment is what this

command looks like in practice across the generations: from the uneven handwriting of an Egyptian Jewish child learning the *alef-bet*, to a child in a Jewish school in London trying to read it.

Watching my daughter read those letters, I felt the force of a tradition strong enough to carry the Jewish people through exile. But I also felt how delicate that strength is. Jewish continuity is not automatic. It depends on parents, teachers and communities taking responsibility for the command to teach the next generation our Torah, our history, our language and our culture.

If we have carried that chain through centuries of exile and upheaval, then, with commitment and effort, we can continue to carry it forward until, through the merit of children learning Torah, we will merit the rebuilding of Jerusalem.



How a Jewish child learned to write, stored in the attic of the *Ben Ezra* Synagogue in Cairo



# WHAT WILL THE REDEMPTION FEEL LIKE?

BY: **NECHAMA DAVIS**

Daf Hashavua Editorial Team, Israel

If you've ever longed and prayed for something to change – and then, against all the odds, it actually does – you will understand the emotions stirred by *Shabbat Nachamu*, which we mark this week.

In the Jewish calendar, *Shabbat Nachamu* marks the transition from devastation after the destruction of the Temples in Jerusalem to the hope that God will fulfil His promise of Redemption. The haftarah we read – “*Nachamu, nachamu ami*” (Comfort, comfort My people!) from Isaiah – feels distant when you are mired in despair but reveals itself as prophetic when the dreamed-for day actually arrives.

Psalm 126, with which we begin *Bircat Hamazon* on Shabbat and Yom tov, fits perfectly into the world of *Shabbat Nachamu*. This psalm, which begins with the words “*Shir HaMa'alot: Beshuv Hashem et shivat Tzion*” (A Song of Ascents: When God returned the captives of Zion), moves from devastation and disbelief, through healing, to Redemption. Singing it after our meal declares that despair did not prevail, that, as if in a dream,

we have moved to “bearing our sheaves of wheat” in joy. Life goes on – we celebrate, study Torah, laugh, and long for Jerusalem.

*Shabbat Nachamu* begins a hopeful journey away from the destruction mourned on Tisha B'Av. Psalm 126 describes what consolation feels like emotionally. “Those who sow in tears shall reap in joy”. At first, consolation seems impossible – the destruction was so devastating, and exile became normal. Hope felt unrealistic. Redemption, when it comes, feels unreal – “we were like dreamers.” Like the haftarah, consolation comes to a people who can barely imagine restoration.

Then comes a stunning reversal: “Then our mouths were filled with laughter, and our tongues with song.” Whereas Tisha B'Av emphasises silence and weeping, Psalm 126 reverses these images, as mouths reopen to song and joy. This emotional turnaround is the essence of *Shabbat Nachamu*.

As we move away from devastation, we are reminded that God “saved up” all our tears for the day of redemption, whether

personal or national. Just as our calendar's festivals guide us toward hope and healing, Jewish practice helps us navigate our personal journeys. Noticing this shift on *Shabbat Nachamu* is a gift: there is reason to hope.

Another thing to note in Psalm 126 is that consolation is gradual. It says, “God has done great things for us,” but then pleads, “Restore our captives, O Lord.” Redemption has begun, but it is still incomplete. This reflects our contemporary situation: Jerusalem has been physically rebuilt but is not yet spiritually whole.

This is the third *Shabbat Nachamu* since Simchat Torah 5784, 7 October 2023. Many families have been bereaved and thousands of soldiers and civilians are wounded. Some are rebuilding their lives – with a combination of crying and laughing. Psalm 126 shows that the process of redemption will be complex – “impossible”, fragile, tear-soaked and miraculous all at once.

*Shabbat Nachamu* reminds us that God will bring the promised Redemption after devastation.



## ISRAEL IN THE PARASHA

*This series is an adaptation of short ideas written by former Chief Rabbi Lord Jakobovits z"l in the 1960s, which were later reprinted in a compilation of his writings, 'Mishnat HaSar'.*

# VA'ETCHANAN: PERSONAL DESIRE FOR THE LAND

The first section of this *parasha* is devoted entirely to Moshe's pleas to be allowed to enter the Land of Israel, and God's refusal to overturn the decree: "Lord God, You have begun to show Your servant Your greatness... what God is there in Heaven or on earth who can do as You have done... Please let me cross over and see the good land beyond the Jordan River..." (*Devarim* 3:24-25).

Why does Moshe pursue this so persistently, given his well-known

humility, emphasising what seems like his personal ambition to enter the Land?

The Ibn Ezra (1089-1167) explains that the purpose of this section is to remind us to love the Land of Israel. If the Land is precious to us, and we keep God's mitzvot, we will not be exiled from it.

“ The purpose of this section is to remind us to love the Land of Israel. If the Land is precious to us and we keep God's mitzvot, we will not be exiled from it.

## PHRASE OF THE WEEK

BY: **RABBI ALEX CHAPPER** | Borehamwood & Elstree United Synagogue

*Each week, working our way through the alphabet, we explore a Jewish word or phrase, bringing clarity and deeper understanding to its meaning.*



Does **DERECH ERETZ** mean:

1. The promised land?
2. Human decency?
3. Code of Jewish law?

While the term *Derech Eretz*, literally translated, means "the way of the land", it refers to an accepted minimum standard of human decency. In other words, it's good manners, proper etiquette and the correct way to behave through which a person could be considered a *mensch*.

In Judaism, we have *halacha* - the body of law that governs our religious, ethical and moral behaviour. And in addition, there's an expectation that we display *Derech Eretz* -

appropriate social conduct in any given situation.

As an indication of the centrality of *Derech Eretz*, the *Midrash* teaches that common decency actually precedes the Torah itself, indicating that *Derech Eretz* is a prerequisite for fulfilling the teachings of the Torah. As the *Mishnah* in *Pirkei Avot* teaches, "If there is no Torah, there is no *Derech Eretz*. If there is no *Derech Eretz*, there is no Torah."

As Rabbi Yerucham Levovitz

(1873-1936) taught: Torah and wisdom are not the remedy for objectionable traits but the reverse; when we refine our character, only then do we acquire Torah.

There are two small tractates in the Talmud that deal with ethical and social conduct: *Derech Eretz Raba* ("the greater") and *Derech Eretz Zuta* ("the minor").



# THE COMMENTATORS: THE NETZIV

BY: **RABBI MICHAEL LAITNER**

US Director of Education & Head of Research at the Rabbi Sacks Legacy

Volozhin, in Belarus, is a small, rural town. Yet its name continues to evoke admiration, for it housed *Yeshivat Etz Chaim*, popularly known simply as "Volozhin" from 1803 until its closure in 1892.

Regarded as the "Oxbridge" of *yeshivot*, its alumni included figures as diverse as Rabbi Abraham Isaac HaKohen Kook (later to be Chief Rabbi of the Land of Israel) and the celebrated national poet, Achad Ha'am, who was not to remain in the *yeshiva* world.

At its helm for nearly 40 years from 1854 was the Netziv. He lived through major events of European nationalism and social upheaval, such as the 1848 revolutions and the reforms of Tsar Alexander II after 1855. A product both of his times and of the Lithuanian approach to learning, he read widely beyond Talmudic studies and, unusually for a *yeshiva*, gave a daily *shiur* on the *Chumash*.

These *shiurim*, delivered in the second period of his life from the 1850s, were later published in his *Haemek Davar* with his own supercommentary, *Harchev Davar*. Acutely aware of the challenges raised by 19<sup>th</sup> century scholars, often in the antagonistic footsteps of Spinoza and Wellhausen, neither of whom were motivated by Jewish core beliefs, the Netziv wanted to promote a religiously sound

and intellectually rigorous understanding of the *Chumash*.

His commentary is not just an explanation of *peshat*, the straightforward meaning of the text, but a concurrent work or even handbook-style work of Jewish thought demonstrating how the Torah addresses topics of Jewish belief and practice, an invaluable contribution for his and subsequent generations.

Let's consider an example from our *parasha*, about what the mitzvah of honouring parents teaches us, beyond its performance.

*Honour your father and mother, as the Lord your God has commanded you, so that you may live long and that it may be well for you in the land that the Lord your God gives you.* (Devarim 5:16)

This is a mitzvah which 'makes sense'; how therefore are we to understand why it is commanded? Surprisingly, the Netziv suggests that it is a *chok*, often understood as a mitzvah which cannot be fathomed. How so? Every mitzvah is ultimately to be performed because God commanded us, not because it 'makes sense', so therefore every mitzvah has an element of *chok* to it, and this is part of the significance of the dramatic

## THE NETZIV

**Name:** Rabbi Naphtali Zvi Yehuda Berlin

**Known as:** (the) Netziv

**When:** 1816-1893

**Locations:** Mir, Volozhin, died in Warsaw en route to the Land of Israel.

**Selected works:** *Haemek Davar* commentary on the Torah, responsa *Meishiv Davar*.

**Further reading:** Rabbi Dr Gil S. Perl, *The Pillar of Volozhin: Rabbi Naftali Zvi Yehuda Berlin and the World of Nineteenth-Century Lithuanian Torah Scholarship*; You Tube *shiurim*; Rabbi Baruch Halevi Epstein, *My Uncle the Netziv*.



“ Every mitzvah is ultimately to be performed because God commanded us, not because it ‘makes sense’, so therefore every mitzvah has an element of *chok* to it, and this is part of the significance of the dramatic Revelation at Sinai.

Revelation at Sinai.

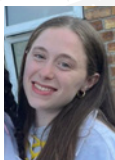
Linking his commentary here to that on *Shemot* 20:12 where the command to honour parents is first mentioned, he writes there that no one mitzvah should be favoured over another simply because it 'makes sense'; they are all commanded by God. Instead, we are encouraged to consider each mitzvah for its inherent worth and what we can learn from it.

# THE TRIBE WEEKLY

PARASHAT VA'ETCHANAN

24-25 JULY | 11 AV

## GOING ABOVE AND BEYOND



BY: **SARA COHEN**

Tribe gap year student

*Parashat Va'etchanan* recounts Moshe's (Moses) speech to *Bnei Yisrael*, the Jewish people, as they prepare to enter Israel. He reminds them of, and highlights, the main principles of Judaism, including the prohibition of idolatry, love and fear of God, and the Ten Commandments.

Moshe tells the nation: "See, I have imparted to you laws and rules... for you to abide by in the land that you are about to enter

and dwell in."

He later commands: "Be careful, then, to do as you have been commanded. Do not turn aside to the right or to the left."

The Torah then, a third time, commands *Bnei Yisrael* to observe the commandments of God.

Professor Nechama Leibowitz (1905-1997) highlights this repetition, and asks: why is it necessary to emphasise not turning aside to the left or right, if *Bnei Yisrael* have already been commanded to follow the mitzvot as instructed?

Both Rashi (1040-1105) and Ramban (1194-1270) explain that this seemingly unnecessary addition comes to teach us a

concept which has not been explicitly stated previously, the concept of 'acting beyond the letter of the law'. Ramban elaborates on this, stating how it is impossible for the Torah to instruct our actions in every possible situation, and instead it is up to us to judge each situation and carry out the correct action, beyond what the Torah has commanded us.

Following the Torah's commandments isn't just about acting according to each instruction that it gives us, but rather, understanding how to act with *derech erez* (respectful ways) and good *middot* (character traits) in all situations, towards everyone.

## 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.

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

SHABBAT

MOSHE

BNEI YISRAEL

SHEMA

VA'ETCHANAN

MEZUZAH

TORAH





# THE TRIBE SCRIBE

VA'ETCHANAN: HEAR HERE!

Remember when Dr Tsoris discovered emojis?



DR TSORIS' EMOJI EXPLOSION ISN'T THE ONLY PROBLEM WITH MESSAGES! WHEN YOU REPLIED 'FINE' TO ME YESTERDAY, I COULDN'T TELL IF YOU WERE FINE-FINE, FAKE-FINE, OR ABOUT-TO-EXPLODE-FINE!



BUT WHEN I SAW YOU, IT WAS QUITE CLEAR YOU WERE ABOUT-TO-EXPLODE-FINE.



EXPLOSION AVERTED! A MESSAGE GIVES YOU THE WORDS, BUT NOT ALWAYS THE FEELING BEHIND THEM.

EARS PICK UP SUBTLE FEELINGS. WHEN YOU SPEAK TO SOMEONE, YOU HEAR THEIR VOICE, TONE, PAUSES AND MOOD. YOU UNDERSTAND MUCH MORE - EMOTION DETECTOR ACTIVATED!



LIGHT TRAVELS FASTER THAN SOUND! HEARING TAKES TIME. YOU CAN'T APPRECIATE A SONG FROM ONE SECOND OF MUSIC, AND YOU CAN'T GRASP A PHONE CALL FROM ONE RANDOM WORD. YOU NEED TO HEAR THE WHOLE THING.



WE COVER OUR EYES WHEN WE SAY THE FIRST LINE OF THE **SHEMA** - EVER WONDERED WHY? IN THIS WEEK'S **PARASHA** WE READ THE FIRST PARAGRAPH OF THE **SHEMA** WHICH BEGINS WITH THE WORDS '**SHEMA YISRAEL**', '**LISTEN, O ISRAEL**.' IT DOESN'T SAY, '**LOOK, O ISRAEL**.'



**RABBI KOVAL** EXPLAINS THAT THIS IS LIKE UNDERSTANDING **GOD** IN OUR LIVES. WE DON'T ALWAYS SEE **GOD** CLEARLY IN ONE MOMENT, JUST LIKE ONE SHORT **WHATSAPP** MAY NOT GIVE THE FULL PICTURE.



BUT WHEN WE LISTEN TO THE WHOLE STORY OF OUR LIVES, THE **JEWISH PEOPLE**, AND THE WORLD, WE CAN START TO NOTICE HOW **GOD** IS GUIDING EVERYTHING. IT'S THE BACKGROUND MUSIC.



THE **SHEMA** SHOWS US: DON'T JUST GLANCE AT THE MESSAGE, LISTEN FOR THE MEANING.

THAT'S ONE REASON WHY WE COVER OUR EYES FOR THE FIRST LINE OF THE **SHEMA**. WE STOP LOOKING FOR A MOMENT AND TRY TO LISTEN MORE DEEPLY. TUNE IN WITH YOUR EARS AND YOUR HEART FOR THE FULL **SHEMA** EXPERIENCE. HEAR HERE!



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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.