

Kol Rina  
An Independent Minyan  
Parashat Bamidbar/ Erev Shavuot  
June 4, 2022 \*\*\* Sivan 5, 5782

[Bamidbar in a Nutshell](https://www.chabad.org/parshah/article_cdo/aid/2121/jewish/Bamidbar-in-a-Nutshell.htm)

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In the Sinai Desert, G-d says to conduct a census of the twelve tribes of Israel. Moses counts 603,550 men of draftable age (20 to 60 years); the tribe of Levi, numbering 22,300 males age one month and older, is counted separately. The Levites are to serve in the Sanctuary. They replace the firstborn, whose number they approximated, since they were disqualified when they participated in the worshipping of the Golden Calf. The 273 firstborn who lacked a Levite to replace them had to pay a fiveshekel "ransom" to redeem themselves. When the people broke camp, the three Levite clans dismantled and transported the Sanctuary, and reassembled it at the center of the next encampment. They then erected their own tents around it: the Kohathites, who carried the Sanctuary's vessels (the Ark, menorah, etc.) in their specially designed coverings on their shoulders, camped to its south; the Gershonites, in charge of its tapestries and roof coverings, to its west; and the families of Merari, who transported its wall panels and pillars, to its north. Before the Sanctuary's entranceway, to its east, were the tents of Moses, Aaron, and Aaron's sons. Beyond the Levite circle, the twelve tribes camped in four groups of three tribes each. To the east were Judah (pop. 74,600), Issachar (54,400) and Zebulun (57,400); to the south, Reuben (46,500), Simeon (59,300) and Gad (45,650); to the west, Ephraim (40,500), Manasseh (32,200) and Benjamin (35,400); and to the north, Dan (62,700), Asher (41,500) and Naphtali (53,400). This formation was kept also while traveling. Each tribe had its own nassi (prince or leader), and its own flag with its tribal color and emblem.

[Haftarah in a Nutshell – Hosea 2: 1-22](https://www.chabad.org/parshah/article_cdo/aid/895213/jewish/Haftorah-in-a-Nutshell.htm)

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This week's haftorah begins with the words, "The number of the children of Israel shall be as the sand of the sea [shore], which can be neither measured nor counted." An appropriate reading for the first Torah reading of the Book of Numbers. Hosea first prophesies about the eventual reunification of the houses of Judah and Israel. During the Messianic Era, these two perennial antagonists will make peace and appoint a single leader. Hosea then rebukes the Jewish people for their infidelity, abandoning their "husband," G-d, and engaging in adulterous affairs with pagan deities. He describes the punishments they will suffer because of this unfaithfulness. Eventually, though, Hosea reassures the Jews that they will repent, and G-d will accept them back wholeheartedly. The haftorah concludes with the moving words: "And I will betroth you to Me forever, and I will betroth you

to Me with righteousness and with justice and with loving-kindness and with mercy."

## FOOD FOR THOUGHT

Law as Love by Rabbi Jonathan Sacks (z"l)

<https://www.rabbisacks.org/covenant-conversation/bamidbar/law-as-love/>

One of the most amusing scenes in Anglo-Jewish history occurred on 14 October 1663. A mere seven years had passed since Oliver Cromwell had found no legal bar to Jews living in England (hence the so-called "return" of 1656). A small synagogue was opened in Creechurch Lane in the City of London, forerunner of Bevis Marks (1701), the oldest still-extant place of Jewish worship in Britain. The famous diarist Samuel Pepys decided to pay a visit to this new curiosity, to see how Jews conducted themselves at prayer. What he saw amazed and scandalised him. As chance or providence had it, the day of his visit turned out to be Simchat Torah. This is how he described what he saw:

And anon their Laws that they take out of the press [i.e., the Ark] are carried by several men, four or five several burthens in all, and they do relieve one another; and whether it is that every one desires to have the carrying of it, I cannot tell, thus they carried it round about the room while such a service is singing ... But, Lord! to see the disorder, laughing, sporting, and no attention, but confusion in all their service, more like brutes than people knowing the true God, would make a man forswear ever seeing them more and indeed I never did see so much, or could have imagined there had been any religion in the whole world so absurdly performed as this.

The Diary of Samuel Pepys, entry for 14 October 1663, ed. Richard Le Gallienne (New York: Modern Library Classics, 2003), p. 106.

This was not the kind of behaviour that Pepys was used to in a house of worship. There is something unique about the relationship of Jews to the Torah, the way we stand in its presence as if it were a king, dance with it as if it were a bride, listen to it telling our story, and study it, as we say in our prayers, as "our life and the length of our days." There are few more poignant lines of prayer than the one contained in a poem said at Neilah, at the end of Yom Kippur: Ein shiyur rak haTorah hazot – "Nothing remains," after the destruction of the Temple and the loss of the land, "but this Torah." A book, a scroll, was all that stood between Jews and despair. What non-Jews (and sometimes Jews) fail to appreciate is how, in Judaism, Torah represents law as love, and love as law. Torah is not just "revealed legislation".<sup>[1]</sup> It represents God's faith in our ancestors that He entrusted them with the creation of a society that would become a home for His Presence and an example to the world.

One of the keys as to how this worked is contained in the parsha of Bamidbar, always read before Shavuot, the commemoration of the Giving of the Torah. This reminds us how central is the idea of wilderness – the desert, no man’s land – is to Judaism. It is midbar, wilderness, that gives our parsha and the book as a whole its name. It was in the desert that the Israelites made a covenant with God and received the Torah, their constitution as a nation under the sovereignty of God. It is the desert that provides the setting for four of the five books of the Torah, and it was there that the Israelites experienced their most intimate contact with God, who sent them water from a rock, manna from heaven and surrounded them with Clouds of Glory.

What story is being told here? The Torah is telling us three fundamentals to Jewish identity. First is the unique phenomenon that, in Judaism, the law preceded the land. For every other nation in history the reverse was the case. First came the land, then human settlements, first in small groups, then in villages, towns and cities. Then came forms of order and governance and a legal system: first the land, then the law.

The fact that in Judaism the Torah was given bemitzra, in the desert, before they had even entered the land, meant that uniquely Jews and Judaism were able to survive, their identity intact, even in exile. Because the law came before the land, even when Jews lost the land they still had the law. This meant that, even in exile, Jews were still a nation. God remained their sovereign. The covenant was still in place. Even without a geography, they had an ongoing history. Even before they entered the land, Jews had been given the ability to survive outside the land.

Second, there is a tantalising connection between midbar, ‘wilderness,’ and davar, ‘word.’ Where other nations found the gods in nature – the rain, the earth, fertility, and the seasons of the agricultural year – Jews discovered God in transcendence, beyond nature, a God who could not be seen but rather heard. In the desert, there is no nature. Instead there is emptiness and silence, a silence in which one can hear the unearthly voice of the One-beyond-the-world. As Edmond Jabès put it: “The word cannot dwell except in the silence of other words. To speak is, accordingly, to lean on a metaphor of the desert.”<sup>[2]</sup>

The German-American political scientist Eric Voegelin saw this as fundamental to the completely new form of spirituality born in the experience of the Israelites:

When we undertake the exodus and wander into the world, in order to found a new society elsewhere, we discover the world as the Desert. The flight leads nowhere, until we stop in order to find our bearings beyond the world. When the world has become Desert, man is at last in the solitude in which he can hear thunderingly the voice of the spirit that with its urgent whispering has already driven and rescued him from Sheol [the domain of death]. In the Desert God spoke to the leader and his tribes; in the desert, by listening to the voice,

by accepting its offer, and by submitting to its command, they had at last reached life and became the people chosen by God.[3]

### Israel and Revelation

In the silence of the desert Israel became the people for whom the primary religious experience was not seeing but listening and hearing: Shema Yisrael. The God of Israel revealed Himself in speech. Judaism is a religion of holy words, in which the most sacred object is a book, a scroll, a text.

Third, and most remarkable, is the interpretation the prophets gave to those formative years in which the Israelites, having left Egypt and not yet entered the land, were alone with God. Hosea, predicting a second exodus, says in God's name regarding the Israelites:

I will lead her into the wilderness and speak tenderly to her . . .

There she will respond as in the days of her youth,

As in the day she came out of Egypt. Hos. 2:14-15

Jeremiah says in God's name:

"I remember the devotion of your youth, how as a bride you loved Me and followed Me through the wilderness, through a land not sown." Jer. 2:2

Shir HaShirim, The Song of Songs, contains the line, "Who is this coming up from the wilderness leaning on her beloved?" (Shir HaShirim 8:5)

Common to each of these texts is the idea of the desert as a honeymoon in which God and the people, imagined as bridegroom and bride, were alone together, consummating their union in love. To be sure, in the Torah itself we see the Israelites as a recalcitrant, obstinate people complaining and rebelling against the God. Yet the Prophets in retrospect saw things differently. The wilderness was a kind of yichud, an alone-togetherness, in which the people and God bonded in love.

Most instructive in this context is the work of anthropologist Arnold Van Gennep who focused attention on the importance of rites of passage.[4] Societies develop rituals to mark the transition from one state to the next – from childhood to adulthood, for example, or from being single to being married – and they involve three stages. The first is separation, a symbolic break with the past. The last is incorporation, re-entering society with a new identity. Between the two comes the crucial stage of transition when, having cast off one identity but not yet donned another, you are remade, reborn, refashioned.

Van Gennep used the term liminal, from the Latin word for "threshold," to describe this transitional state when you are in a kind of no-man's-land between the old and the new. That is what the wilderness signifies for Israel: liminal space between slavery and freedom, past and future, exile and return, Egypt and the Promised Land. The desert was the space that made transition and transformation possible. There, in no-man's-land, the Israelites, alone with God and with one another, could cast off one identity and assume another. There they could be reborn, no longer

slaves to Pharaoh, instead servants of God, summoned to become “a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.” (Ex. 19:6)

Seeing the wilderness as the space-between helps us to see the connection between the Israelites in the days of Moses and the ancestor whose name they bore. For it was Jacob among the patriarchs who had his most intense experiences of God in liminal space, between the place he was leaving and the one he was travelling to, alone and at night. It was there, fleeing from his brother Esau but not yet arrived at the house of Laban, that he saw a vision of a ladder stretching from earth to heaven with angels ascending and descending, and there on his return that he fought with a stranger from night until dawn and was given the name Israel.

These episodes can now be seen to be prefigurations of what would later happen to his descendants (ma’aseh avot siman levanim, “the acts of the fathers are a sign of what would later happen to the children”).[5]

The desert thus became the birthplace of a wholly new relationship between God and humankind, a relationship built on covenant, speech, and love as concretised in the Torah. Distant from the great centres of civilisation, a people found themselves alone with God and there consummated a bond that neither exile nor tragedy could break. That is the moral truth at the beating heart of our faith: that it is not power or politics that link us to God, but love.

Joy in the celebration of that love led King David to “leap and dance” when the Ark was brought into Jerusalem, earning the disapproval of King Saul’s daughter Michal (2 Sam. 6:16), and many centuries later led the Anglo-Jews of Creechurch Lane to dance on Simchat Torah, to the disapproval of Samuel Pepys. When love defeats dignity, faith is alive and well.

[1] As Moses Mendelssohn described it in *Jerusalem, or, On Religious Power and Judaism*, trans. Allan Arkush (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 1983), pp. 89–90, pp. 126–28. [2] Edmond Jabès, *Du Desert au Libre*, Paris, Pierre Belfond, 1980, p. 101. [3] Eric Voegelin, *Israel and Revelation*, Louisiana State University Press, 1956, p. 153. [4] Arnold Van Gennep, *The Rites of Passage* (Chicago: University of Chicago) 1960. [5] See Ramban’s commentary on Gen. 12:6.

### [Parashat Bamidbar: When Women Are Invisible by Sivan Rotholz](https://www.myjewishlearning.com/article/parashat-bamidbar-when-women-are-invisible/)

<https://www.myjewishlearning.com/article/parashat-bamidbar-when-women-are-invisible/>

Parashat Bamidbar opens with God speaking to Moses in the wilderness of Sinai, instructing him to “take a census of the whole Israelite community,” counting “every male, head by head.” God goes on to note that only men 20 years of age and older who are able to bear arms should be counted, and so commentators have noted that this was likely a census to determine conscription into the army. But when God specifically tells Moses to take a census of “the whole” community and then

excludes women from this designation, Israelite women are excluded from the idea of who and what comprises Jewish community. The women become invisible. When the biblical God draws lines around who does and does not count in Jewish community, those demarcations have ramifications that remain harmful – and that women and allies are still working to rectify – to this day.

The great scholars and commentators of Jewish tradition found inherent value in those who were counted by God. Rashi believed that God took a census of those who were dear to him, and Rabbi Isaac Arama argues that each person counted had individual worth (Akeidat Yitzhak #72). The Midrash compares those who were counted to God's precious pearls, suggesting that God cared deeply for them because they were the children to whom God had given birth (Bamidbar Rabbah 4:2).

This assigning of value to those who were counted begs the question: Were the Israelite women not also dear to God? Did they not also have individual worth? Were they not also the precious children of the divine? What does such exclusion say about the perceived value of Jewish women and their contributions to Jewish communal life?

“Give me ten emesdike yiddin [true Jews],” taught the Kotzker Rebbe, “and I will change the world.” But what are “ten true Jews,” and how do we move forward into an age when women are counted among them?

These are the questions that Judith Plaskow asks in her groundbreaking 1986 article that later became the basis for her seminal work, *Standing Again at Sinai*. She looks at a moment not unlike the census in Parashat Bamidbar – the moment when women are excluded from entering into a communal covenant with God – and argues that such moments make Jewish women invisible and have a lasting negative impact. Such exclusion, Plaskow notes, “sets forth a pattern recapitulated again and again in Jewish sources. Women's invisibility at [such moments] is perpetuated by the later tradition which in its comments and codifications takes women as objects of concern or legislation but rarely sees them as shapers of tradition and actors in their own lives.”

Critically, Plaskow offers Jewish women a way forward despite a history of invisibility: “On the one hand, women can choose to accept our absence [at such moments], in which case we allow the male text to define us and our relationship to the tradition. On the other hand, we can stand on the ground of our experience, on the certainty of our membership in our own people. To do this, however, is to be forced to remember and recreate its history. It is to move from anger at the tradition, through anger to empowerment. It is to begin the journey toward the creation of a feminist Judaism.”

Thirty-five years after Plaskow invited us to create a feminist Judaism, and thousands of years after women were excluded from being counted among the Israelite community, Jewish women are still working to move from anger to

empowerment; they are still fighting to be among the “ten true Jews” changing the world.

But Jewish women are changing the world nonetheless.

In 2018, a group of women came together to declare the Jewish calendar year 5779 “The Year of the Jewish Woman,” noting the many ways in which Jewish women’s “work and contributions are consistently undervalued, underestimated and often rendered invisible.” By the time that year was up, these women had co-authored an article, signed by nearly 600 women, that called on men in positions of power to be active allies in working to eradicate Jewish gender inequality. They challenged male allies not only to pledge to lift up Jewish women, but to “live the pledge,” launching a website that empowers allies to actively participate in this critical work.

The following year yet another group of women came together to argue for the importance of including women’s voices and scholarship in source sheets. “When we curate all-male source sheets, we send the message that men have a monopoly on Jewish wisdom,” the article asserts. “We know that this is not the case. The Kranjec Test is an invitation to reimagine whose wisdom we teach.” For thousands of years, from their exclusion from the census in Parashat Bamidbar to their exclusion from top positions in Jewish organizations, Jewish women have been made invisible. But despite their systematic exclusion, women have always known they belonged within Judaism, have known their own worth even when they did not see their value reflected back to them. Today, for the first time in history, Jewish women en masse are Torah scholars and educators, rabbis and cantors, authors of biblical commentary and experts in Jewish law. Jewish women today remember their history, and are working to recreate it so that, together with their allies, they might forge a more equitable future in which they, too, will be counted. *(Sivan Rotholz is a professor teaching at the intersection of creative writing and gynocentric Torah. She is currently pursuing rabbinic ordination.)*

[Bemidbar by Rabbi J. Rolando Matalon](https://www.bj.org/toward-shabbat-bemidbar-2/)  
<https://www.bj.org/toward-shabbat-bemidbar-2/>

Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi (3rd century) taught that when Moses went up to heaven to receive the Torah from God, the ministering angels became jealous that he, a mere human being, and not they, would merit such a privilege.

God told Moses to respond to them. Addressing God, Moses asked:

“Master of the Universe, the Torah that You are giving me, what is written in it?”

“I am Adonai, your God, who took you out of Egypt...”

Moses turned to the angels: “Did you go down to Egypt? Were you slaves to Pharaoh? Why do you need the Torah?”

He then continued with all Ten Commandments:

“Do you live among the heathen nations that you need to be warned to not have other deities? Do you do any work that you need to cease and rest on the Sabbath? Do you have parents that you need to honor?” And so on.

The Torah we will receive this year anew, as Shavuot begins tomorrow night, was not designed for angels but for human beings living in the real world, with all its chaos, its trials, its demands and struggles.

The Hebrew Bible has penetrated the consciousness of most of humanity with its call to moral awakening and its claim for human dignity and for justice. The very first thing we learn about us humans in the opening chapter of Genesis is that every person is made in the image of God. That means that each individual is endowed with holiness and that we are all equal and of infinite value.

It has been a long, sinuous, tortuous, and bloody road from Sinai till present times in the struggle for human dignity. The Torah and the mitzvot, the rabbis teach, were given “letzreref bahen et haberiot—to refine humanity.” Humanity has no doubt made significant progress. But just as we thought that we were becoming more morally refined and, here at home, a more perfect union, we are being confronted with the barbarism in our own midst. As a country, we have tolerated the proliferation of lies, a violent insurrection, ongoing racism, misogyny, and more. Over and over again, periodic mass shootings remind us that we live in a violent society, where guns, power, and money are more precious than human life.

The Torah tells us that God spoke to the assembled people at Sinai “kol gadol velo yasaf—with a mighty voice that did not cease” (Deuteronomy 5:19). God will never cease to remind us of the Torah’s radical and revolutionary demand: that we uphold the sanctity of life and the dignity of every human being. It will take a large dose of moral grandeur and spiritual audacity, to use Abraham Joshua Heschel’s words, to confront the barbarism in our midst. And more than that, it will take determined action, even when we are tired, frustrated, and in despair.

I believe that there is no more important and sacred action at this time, for the sake of human dignity in our country, than to spare no effort in rescuing and repairing our democracy and our democratic culture, and establishing the will of the majority. In voting; in enabling others to vote; in combating voter suppression; in fighting for one person, one vote.

And this concerns not just presidential elections, as Dahlia Lithwick, lawyer and senior editor at Slate, told us in a recent presentation at BJ. Voting at every opportunity and all levels—city, state, and federal—is more crucial than ever before. As a community, we will put ourselves to work; we will be following up soon to organize and mobilize on behalf of our democracy.

I grew up under a military dictatorship in Argentina. Political activity was strictly forbidden; political parties were proscribed; there was no voting, no congress, no tolerance for dissenting opinions. When democracy was reestablished there and elections were held in October 1983, I was already living in New York City so I was



not able to vote. I became a U.S. citizen in 2005 and entered a voting booth for the first time in my life in 2006, at age 50. My hands were shaking when I pulled the lever. I cried and said shehehyanu. That's why this issue is so close to my heart. We are moving towards a precipice that we risk falling off of, and the time to change course is running out.

Kol gadol velo yasaf—God's voice will never cease to call from Sinai. Will we accept or reject the Torah's mandate to uphold the sanctity of life and dignity of all human beings? *(José Rolando Matalon, B'nai Jeshurun's senior rabbi, was born in Buenos Aires, Argentina, and was educated in Buenos Aires, Montreal, Jerusalem, and New York City. After his ordination at the Jewish Theological Seminary in 1986, Rabbi Matalon came to BJ to share the pulpit—and vision—of his mentor and friend Rabbi Marshall T. Meyer. They worked together to revitalize the congregation and turn its focus to prayer, learning, service, social justice, and interfaith cooperation.)*

### Where is God in the Book of Ruth by Rabbi Prof. David Frankel

<https://schechter.edu/where-is-god-in-the-book-of-ruth/>

Where is God in the Book of Ruth? Although the book's protagonists often mention God in the things they say, the narrator of the story barely attributes any event to God explicitly. Additionally, there are no miracles in the story, no angels or prophets, and no word coming out of God's mouth. Where, then, is God? Rabbi Prof. David Frankel, Associate Professor of Bible at the Schechter Institute of Jewish Studies shares that it seems as though "one can find a hint of the narrator's position in Naomi's words after Ruth's return from a day of gathering in Boaz's field."

After learning that Ruth gathered on Boaz's land, Naomi says to her daughter-in-law, "Blessed be he of the LORD, who has not failed in His kindness to the living or to the dead! For," Naomi explained to her daughter-in-law, "the man is related to us; he is one of our redeeming kinsmen." (Ruth 2:20)

The question arises, who has not failed his kindness to the living and the dead? Does Naomi mean God or is she referring to Boaz? It seems to Prof. Frankel "that the wording of the text should be seen as a deliberate ambiguity." The intention of the ambiguity is to hint at the narrator's answer to the question we asked – where is God in the scroll? The answer is that God is behind the acts of kindness that people choose to do. When Boaz did a kindness to Ruth and did good to her, and indirectly did good to Naomi and her dead, he fulfilled the kindness that God wanted to do with them. The message that emerges from these words is clear: God appears in the world if we act as His messengers in doing kindness. The responsibility is on him to bring God into the world, and if we do not see him then the blame is on us.

Let us hope that we too will be able to fill the world with grace and love and fulfill

our mission in the world. Chag Shavuot Sameach!

*(David Frankel has served as a senior Bible lecturer at the Schechter Institute of Jewish Studies since 1992. He earned his PhD at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem under the direction of Prof. Moshe Weinfeld. His publications include "The Murmuring Stories of the Priestly School: and "The Land of Canaan and the Destiny of Israel." From 1991 to 1996, Rabbi Dr. Frankel was rabbi of Congregation Shevet Achim in Gilo, Jerusalem.)*

*Erwin Mevorah sent this to me (so no link):*

### Perasha - Bamidbar- Shabout- Rav Fischel Schacter shilita

The Rabbi began his talk this week by explaining the theme of the holy holiday of Shabout- it's the intimate time we have between HASHEM and ourselves. The first requirement that is needed is for there to be shalom - between HASHEM and us . When we have a desire to help out others , especially with it comes to shalom bayit - there is one rule that we must follow - before we can give advice and help others out of a problem we have to first make sure that we already have shalom bayit . You can not help out the next person solve his problem if we didn't first solve the problem ourselves.

The Chatam Soffer says that when one is having a difficult time with a livelihood there is another way that he can pray to HASHEM for success. From his shalom bayit this could be the path where his parnasa can come from .

The Rabbi told over our goal on Shabuout is to " re package ourselves ". When HASHEM will see how hard we are trying- he will bring us all the way up to heights that we never thought were imaginable. When we realize that it's all coming from him - we have the ability to become so close to HASHEM . If we think we accomplish on our own , then he will make us realize that by ourselves we can't accomplish much . We have to know - it starts with HASHEM -the only reason we have success is because it's his will . When we re package ourselves- HASHEM sees the new us . This person that he now sees - he will help . The new person we will become will be unrecognizable to the satan , he will not bother us the same way .

The Sefat Emmet tells us from pirke abot how we have to prepare ourselves to receive the Torah - it's not an inheritance. Yet we know the saying - the Torah that Moshe commanded us - it is an inheritance. Says the Sefat Emmet how do we resolve this - is it an inheritance or not . When one gives over a tree as an inheritance to his family- he is giving the tree- he's not giving the fruits that will come at a later date . The fruit will come when the person works the land and then he looks up to HASHEM and prays that he will be successful . On Shabuout we are judged for the " fruits of the upcoming year . The fruits are the physical and the spiritual.

The physical refer to the actual fruit . The spiritual refers to the Torah that we will be able to study and learn in the upcoming year. Nothing happens if we

don't toil in Torah , we have to give it 100% effort- and know that success depends only on HASHEM . Torah is indeed an inheritance- yet to gain ownership of it , we need to put in the hard work .When we look to HASHEM and we show him how much we rely and need him - he takes us all the way up to the top - this is Shabuout

Shabbat shalom

Hag samaich