

Erev Shabbos • 28 Iyar 5786 • May 15, 2026

Parshas Bamidbar — Haftarah Hoshea 2

CANDLE LIGHTING

8:18 PM

Friday • Vaughan, ON

SHABBOS ENDS

9:29 PM

Motzaei Shabbos

SEFIRAS HAOMER

Day 44

Gevurah sheb'Malchus

PIRKEI AVOS

Ch. 6

Kinyan Torah • Acquisition of Torah

THIS WEEK'S PORTION

A Counting That Counts.

At the start of the year, Israel's Central Bureau of Statistics reported that the country's population had crossed ten million for the first time.* The number was front-page news. Analysts wrote about growth curves and demographic trends — how long until fifteen million, whether the surge was driven by birth rate or immigration — the mechanics of large numbers.

The Torah also opens Sefer Bamidbar, the Book of Numbers, with a count. But the count operates on entirely different terms. The Torah does not simply say לִפְקֹד — to count. It says שָׂאוּ אֵת רֹאשׁ — *lift the head* of every member of the congregation, one by one, by name. A lover, we are taught, cannot help returning again and again to the beloved's name — and so Hashem returns to the names of His people.¹ For they are dear to Him, Rashi explains: He counts them constantly — when they left Egypt, after the Golden Calf, now again as He prepares to rest His presence among them.²

This census takes place on the first of the Hebrew month of Iyar — less than six weeks before the giving of the Torah at Sinai.³ It is not administrative. It is preparatory. Before the Torah can be given, every single Jew must be counted — because the Torah is only complete when every soul is present to receive it. One person missing, and Sinai cannot happen.

The Torah was not given to a crowd. It was given to a named, counted, known nation of individuals.

A statistic produces a total. The Torah's census produces a statement of value.

This is the difference between a statistic and a headcount. A statistic tells you how many. The Torah's census tells each person: you are here, you are known, and without you the whole thing is incomplete.

The Midrash says that Hashem counted Yisrael the way a person counts precious stones — not to know how many, but because each one is irreplaceable.⁴ A jeweler does not count gems the way a merchant counts sacks of grain. Grain is interchangeable. Gems are not. That is the count of Bamidbar.

And so the parsha falls, every year, on the Shabbos before Shavuot. The calendar is teaching us the prerequisite. Before the mountain, before the thunder, before the nation declared *we will do and we will hear* — there must first be a count. Because a Torah that belongs to the nation must be received by each person, individually, with their name called.

* CBS, January 1, 2026. ¹ Penei David, Bamidbar. ² Rashi on Bamidbar 1:1; cf. Bamidbar Rabbah 1:9. ³ Likkutei Sichos vol. 2, Bamidbar. ⁴ Bamidbar Rabbah 1:10.

THE HAFTORAH

A Precious Stone.

the haftarah of Hoshea, read this Shabbos, and a stone that returned

"And I will betroth you to Me forever; I will betroth you to Me in righteousness and justice, in kindness and mercy. I will betroth you to Me in faithfulness — and you shall know Hashem."

HOSHEA 2:21–22

Earlier this month, a five-ton stone that had fallen from the Western Wall two thousand years ago was returned to its place in Jerusalem. The stone had been on display at the Kirya military headquarters in Tel Aviv. Israel's Defense Minister said simply: the stones of the Western Wall belong to the wall.¹ No one debated the point. A stone that had been separated from its place for two millennia was brought back, and everyone understood that it had never stopped belonging there.

The haftarah for Bamidbar, taken from Hoshea, ends with three verses that read like a wedding ceremony. וְאֶרְשָׁתִּיךָ לִי לְעוֹלָם — *I will betroth you to Me forever. I will betroth you in justice and in law, in kindness and in mercy. I will betroth you in faithfulness, and you shall know Hashem.*

Three betrothals. The Radak asks: why three? One would be enough. He answers that each corresponds to a different dimension of the relationship — the first to the covenant itself, the second to the moral qualities that sustain it, the third to the inner knowing that makes it come alive.²

These are the verses some have the practice to recite every weekday morning while winding the tefillin strap around the finger — a private reenactment of the marriage at Sinai. The timing is not incidental. We read these words the Shabbos before Shavuot, which the tradition calls the wedding day between Hashem and Yisrael. The Torah is the

marriage contract. Sinai is the canopy. And every year, Shavuot is the anniversary.

Before the wedding, the groom must "know the bride's name" and become acquainted with the one who bears it. Before Sinai, Hashem counts every Jew.

Even surrounded by guests, the marriage itself is formed under the chuppah — a moment of connection between the חתן and כלה who stand side by side. This is the same principle as the census of Bamidbar: the wedding is between two named individuals, not a crowd.³

A stone returns to a wall after two thousand years because it never stopped belonging. A bride returns to a groom for the same reason. The Torah is given again this week — to a people who, in every generation and every exile, have never stopped belonging to the One who gave it.

ON THE HORIZON

Thu, May 21 • 5 Sivan

Erev Shavuot. Dairy meal, flowers, all-night learning. Candle lighting from a pre-existing flame.

Fri–Sat, May 22–23 • 6–7 Sivan

שבוועות Shavuot. The giving of the Torah at Sinai. Many read Megillas Rus, the Book of Ruth. Yizkor, the memorial prayer, on the second day.

Sun, May 24 • 8 Sivan

Isru Chag. The lingering joy of Yom Tov carried into the week.

¹ Western Wall Heritage Foundation, May 4, 2026. ² Radak on Hoshea 2:21–22. ³ Cf. Rambam, *Hilchos Ishus*.

The Price of Admission.

This is the way of Torah — bread with salt you shall eat, water by measure you shall drink, on the ground you shall sleep, a life of hardship you shall live, and in Torah you shall toil. (Avos 6:4)

The mishna is not prescribing poverty. It is describing a test.¹ If you can learn Torah only when the conditions are right — when the house is quiet, the coffee is hot, the schedule is clear — then the Torah depends on the conditions, not on you. The mishna says: start with the worst case. Bread and salt, water by measure, the bare ground. If you can learn there, you can learn anywhere — and then the Torah is yours.

CURRENT EVENTS

The Flag We Stand For.

on the banners of Bamidbar, and a mob in Flatbush

On Monday night, a mob carrying Hezbollah flags and Hamas symbols marched through Flatbush and surrounded Young Israel of Midwood. A Jewish girl and a sixteen-year-old boy were physically attacked outside the shul. Four arrests were made; hundreds of police held a line between the demonstrators and the entrance. It was the second time in six days a New York City synagogue had been besieged.²

This week's parsha is the one that introduces the דגלים — the flags. Each tribe received its own banner and its assigned position around the Mishkan, the portable Sanctuary. The Midrash says that when Hashem appeared at Sinai, the angels descended in formations under flags, and Yisrael saw them and longed for flags of their own. Hashem said: by your lives, I will fulfill your desire — איש על דגלו, each man stationed by his own flag, each tribe given its banner and its place in the camp.³

The Midrash then quotes Shir HaShirim, the Song of Songs: *Who is she that looks forth like the dawn, awesome as an army with banners?*⁴ When the nations of the world see

כך היא דרכה של תורה • פת במלח תאכל • ומים במשורה תשתה • ועל הארץ תישן • וחי צער תחיה • ובתורה אתה עמל (פרקי אבות ו:ד)

A person who learns only when it is comfortable has not yet acquired Torah. A person who learns even when it is hard has made it part of themselves. This week's chapter is read on the Shabbos before Shavuot, and it asks a single question: how badly do you want this? Bread and salt is the price of admission.

Yisrael arranged under their flags, they are struck with awe. They ask: who is this? And the answer is not military power. It is genuine order. Identity. Each tribe in its place, each person with a name, each family under its own banner, surrounding something holy at the center.

A flag can mean two things. It can be a weapon — the flag of a militia carried through someone else's neighborhood to terrorize them. Or it can be a statement of identity — here is who we are, here is where we stand, here is what we gather around. The encampment in the *midbar*, the wilderness, was not a defensive formation.⁵ It was a statement of purpose. The Mishkan sat at the center. The tribes were stationed around it. The message of the camp was not *keep out* but *this is what we protect*. A Jew does not derive identity from opposition to an enemy. A Jew derives identity from proximity to something sacred.

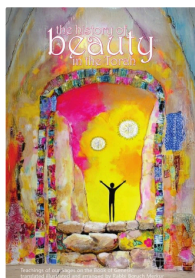
Monday night in Flatbush, Jews kept their places in a shul while a mob screamed outside it. That is a *degel*. Not a flag you wave in someone's face. A flag you stand under because it marks your place — and you do not leave your place.

¹ Cf. Rambam, intro. to Avos. ² Algemeiner; CAM, May 11–12, 2026. ³ Bamidbar Rabbah 2:3. ⁴ Shir HaShirim 6:10. ⁵ Likkutei Sichos vol. 2, Bamidbar.

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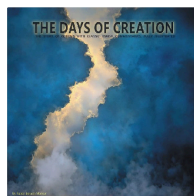
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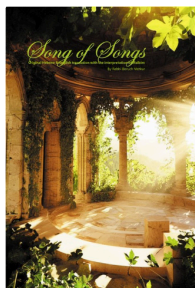


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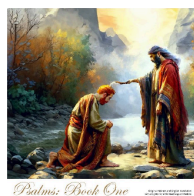


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