

In memory of all those brutally murdered in the war on Israel,
including the recently fallen soldiers of the IDF

בס"ד

6 JANUARY 2024 | 25 TEVET 5784

VOLUME 37 | #18

DAF HASHAVUA

שְׁמוֹת | SHEMOT

SHABBAT ENDS:

London 5.01pm
Southend 4.58pm
Edinburgh 4.58pm
Leeds 4.59pm
Hull 4.59pm
Glasgow 5.03pm
Birmingham 5.05pm
Sheffield 5.04pm
Manchester 5.04pm
Liverpool 5.07pm
Southport 5.10pm
Cardiff 5.17pm
Dublin 5.19pm
Jerusalem 5.30pm

**Shabbat
Mevarechim**

**Rosh Chodesh
Shevat is on
Thursday**



**שְׁמוֹת
SHEMOT**

1st Sidra in:
**שְׁמוֹת
SHEMOT**

By Numbers:
**124 VERSES
1,763 WORDS
6,762 LETTERS**

Headlines:
**THE START OF
THE SLAVERY;
INTRODUCTION
TO MOSHE
(MOSES)**

SHEMOT:
Artscroll p.292
Hertz p.206
Soncino p.319

HAFTARAH:
Artscroll p.1146
Hertz p.225
Soncino p.345

Sidra Summary

1ST ALIYA (KOHEN) – SHEMOT 1:1-17

The Torah names the sons of Yaakov who came down to Egypt. Yosef's death is recorded again. His brothers also die. The nation increases in number. A new Pharaoh comes to power, who subjects the nation to hard labour. Yet the more they are afflicted, the more they increase. The Egyptians intensify the labour. Pharaoh instructs the Hebrew midwives to kill new-born Hebrew males. They refuse, instead giving the babies food and drink (see Rashi's commentary).

***Point to Consider:** What miraculous birth-rate is hinted to in verse 1:7? (see Rashi)*

2ND ALIYA (LEVI) – 1:18-2:10

Pharaoh commands the Egyptians to drown all new-born males in the River Nile. Moshe is born. After hiding him for three months, his mother Yocheved places him in a basket in the reeds at the riverbank. Pharaoh's daughter retrieves the basket and identifies the baby as a Hebrew infant. Moshe's sister Miriam, watching from afar, offers to get a Hebrew nurse. Pharaoh's daughter agrees; Miriam brings Yocheved, who looks after him until he is weaned. Moshe is then brought up in Pharaoh's house.

3RD ALIYA (SHLISHI) – 2:11-28

Moshe encounters an Egyptian striking a Hebrew; he kills the Egyptian. Pharaoh hears of Moshe's crime. Moshe flees for his life, arriving in Midian, where he meets the daughters of Re'uel (also known as Yitro) by a well. Moshe marries Re'uel's daughter Tziporah. They have a child, called Gershom. God hears the Hebrews in Egypt crying out because of their hard labour.

4TH ALIYA (REVI'Y) – 3:1-15

Moshe, shepherding Yitro's flock, arrives at the 'Mountain of God'. He encounters a fiery blaze in a bush, which is not consumed by the flames.

God appears, instructing Moshe to take off his shoes. God tells Moshe that He will rescue the nation and that Moshe should go to Pharaoh and instruct him to let the nation leave Egypt.

5TH ALIYA (CHAMISHI) – 3:16-4:17

God reassures Moshe that the elders of Israel will respond to his call. Moshe is to request from Pharaoh that he let the Hebrews out for three days, to bring offerings in the desert. Pharaoh will refuse, after which God will smite Egypt with plagues. God empowers Moshe with three signs to show the people – a staff that turns into a snake, his hand turning white with the appearance of leprosy and water taken from the Nile turning to blood. Moshe is reluctant to take the leadership. God tells Moshe that his brother Aharon can be his spokesman.

6TH ALIYA (SHISHI) – 4:18-4:31

Moshe returns to Egypt from Midian. God tells Moshe to warn Pharaoh that He will eventually kill the Egyptian firstborn if Pharaoh refuses Moshe's requests (Rashi). Moshe fails to circumcise his new-born son Eliezer when they stop in lodgings on the way; Tziporah does it instead. Aharon greets Moshe, who relates God's words to him. Aharon in turn relays these words to the people. Moshe performs the three signs.

7TH ALIYA (SHEVI'Y) – 5:1-6:1

Moshe and Aharon approach Pharaoh. Pharaoh refuses their requests and increases the work load. The people complain to Moshe and Aharon. Moshe asks God why He sent him, if his intercession has only made life more difficult.

HAFTARAH

The prophet Yeshaya depicts how low the nation of Israel has stooped and bemoans the drunken arrogance of the tribe of Ephraim and the other lost tribes. However, one day a great shofar will be blown and all those cast away in foreign lands will return to Jerusalem.



United Synagogue Daf Hashavua


Produced by US Education & Events together with the Rabbinical Council of the United Synagogue

Editor-in-Chief: Rabbi Baruch Davis
Editorial and Production Team:

Rabbi Daniel Sturgess
Rabbi Michael Laitner
Rebbetzen Nechama Davis
Joanna Rose
Laurie Maurer
Richard Herman
Tatiana Krupiniina

www.theus.org.uk
©United Synagogue 2023

To sponsor Daf Hashavua,
or if you have any comments or questions,
please contact
education@theus.org.uk



The Search for Identity



AYALAH SHAPIRA-SHABO

Jewish Chaplain
for Scottish
Universities

If Parashat Shemot ('Names') is the prologue to the Book of Shemot, it is an exceptionally eventful and condensed one. Yet there is a glaring omission in the narrative. The information about a period in excess of 200 years, from the end of Bereishit until the appearance of Moshe (Moses) – in which the descendants of Yaakov (Jacob) became a nation of slaves – is sparse, almost anecdotal. The text itself mentions very little of the lives of the Hebrews and their society. In fact, the main thing noted at the start of the book is the Hebrews' immense demographic growth and physical power, followed by the sadly familiar story of antisemitism on a national level. Indeed, despite the absence of any sign of hostility or intentions to stand against Egypt, the success of the Hebrew people is met with suspicion and fear, emotions translated into oppression and enslavement.

Despite these omissions, this introductory parasha sets the tone for the rest of the book of Shemot through the lens of Moshe's journey.

Rabbi Ilay Ofran (psychologist and rabbi at Herzog College, Jerusalem) presents a captivating psychological analysis of Moshe's character formation, employing American psychologist James Marcia's four statuses of identity: Identity Diffusion, Identity Foreclosure, Identity Moratorium and Identity Achievement. According to Marcia's model, the attainment of a coherent and steadfast identity hinges upon the depth and duration of exploration, alongside a genuine commitment to the selected identity.

We see a young Moshe navigating these statuses. Prior to his return to Egypt, he embarks on an extensive journey to ascertain his true identity. He finds himself grappling with multiple potential affiliations. The Torah portrays him initially as a *son of the tribe of Levi*, recounting, "A certain member of the house of Levi went and took a woman of Levi... she conceived and bore a son." Subsequently, Pharaoh's daughter identifies him as a *Hebrew* after drawing him from the Nile, stating, "This must be a Hebrew child." Following Moshe's conflicts with a Hebrew and an Egyptian, and his subsequent flight to Midian, Yitro (Jethro)'s daughters assumed that Moshe was an Egyptian, claiming, "An Egyptian rescued us." Yitro's

family then extended a warm refuge to Moshe, providing a haven from the tumultuous events in Egypt.

Eventually, after the 'nudge' from God, Moshe returned to Egypt as *both* an Israelite and a Levite. Only after years of challenging self-exploration was Moshe able to assert his own identity, after which he could embark on his historical task of redeeming the Hebrews.

The consolidation of the Israelites' identity remains a distant prospect as the Book of Shemot commences. A protracted journey lies ahead—a narrative unfolding across numerous chapters. Yet, Moshe, the remarkable leader destined to emancipate the enslaved people from Egypt and guide them across the desert toward the Promised Land, personified the Hebrews' search for national identity. Through his personal example, Moshe charted the course for their collective journey.

As Moshe undergoes this transformative process, he not only exemplifies faith in God, but also epitomises a comprehensive and profound journey toward self-realisation. His personal evolution serves as a testament to the potential for fulfilment waiting at the end of this lengthy journey, inspiring the development of an entire liberated nation.



**Laurie
MAURER**

Projects Executive,
US Education and
Events

Two weeks ago was the 60th anniversary of the release of Disney's *The Sword in the Stone*, a film based on T. H. White's novel of the same name. It tells the story of a magical sword that had been wedged into a stone, only to be removed by the divine heir to the throne. A boy, who had lived in hiding until he was 15, pulled out the sword (Excalibur), where no one had before him - proving him to be the legitimate king of England, King Arthur.

Both the film and the book are based on the poem 'Merlin', written by medieval Christian poet Robert de Boron in around 1200 – nearly a thousand years ago! But where did the legend really come from? Are you wondering yet why this article

is in the Daf Hashavua?

In this week's parasha, Shemot, Moshe (Moses) 'meets' God at the burning bush and is told to go to Egypt to redeem *Bnei Yisrael* (the Children of Israel) and "take with you this rod, with which you shall perform the signs" (Shemot 4:17).

The Rabbis in the Midrash (Shemot Rabba 8:3) tell us that this rod was made of sapphire. *Pirkei D'Rabbi Eliezer* (another midrashic work, thought to have been composed in the 8th or 9th century) gives us a bit more background about this rod:

"Rabbi Levi said: That rod which was created in twilight (see Pirkei Avot 5:6) was given to the first man out of the Garden of Eden. Adam gave it over to Chanoch, and Chanoch gave it to Noach, and Noach to Shem. Shem passed it on to Avraham, Avraham to Yitzchak and Yitzchak to Yaakov, and Yaakov brought it down to Egypt and passed it on to his son Yosef. When Yosef died and they pillaged his household goods, it was placed in

the palace of Pharaoh. And Yitro was one of the magicians of Egypt, and he saw the rod and the letters which were upon it, and he desired in his heart (to have it), and he took it and brought it and planted it in the midst of the garden of his house. No one was able to approach it anymore. When Moshe came to his house, he went into the garden of Yitro's house, saw the rod and read the letters which were upon it, and he put forth his hand and took it. Yitro watched Moshe and said: This one in the future will redeem Israel from Egypt."

Does this not sound familiar? Look at the similarities – in both scenarios an item with supernatural powers is lodged into the ground and cannot be moved. In both scenarios the person who is able to remove the item is the one who becomes the leader of their people. Could it be that the legend of King Arthur and his sword is based on Jewish literature written about four centuries earlier?

Interview with Lali Virdee, 'The Shabbat Lift Expert'



Lali Virdee is the Director of Property for the United Synagogue. We sat down with him to ask some questions about his job...

TELL US ABOUT YOUR BACKGROUND AND HOW YOU CAME TO WORK FOR THE US?

My background is in construction and civil engineering. My two prior jobs were for the Mayor of London in their large infrastructure department and then in sustainability. I was approached for a job at a 'mystery' organisation that turned out to be the United Synagogue!

I hadn't learnt much about Judaism before joining, but in my first week, I had a tour of US buildings, learned about the community and was introduced to some applications of Jewish law.

WHAT IS THE MAIN FOCUS OF YOUR WORK?

I lead the property department which makes sure that all US properties, including shuls, offices and burial grounds are maintained and managed according to government regulations as well as *halacha* (Jewish law). There is sometimes difficulty making sure these two systems can work together and we have to work to uphold both.

The day-to-day tasks can range from testing fire alarms to designing new shul buildings, so our work remit is very varied.

COULD YOU GIVE AN EXAMPLE OF THE WAYS THAT NEW US BUILDINGS ARE SHABBAT-COMPLIANT?

When designing new buildings, we must adhere to the laws of Shabbat while also making the building as accessible as possible. A big example is Shabbat-compliant lifts. There are legal requirements as well as halachic parameters to comply to, so I had to learn about this before putting lifts into shuls. The Institute for Science and Halacha in Jerusalem helped me to gain clarity on this issue and I have had fascinating conversations with experts in the field.

WHAT IS THE MOST INTERESTING THING YOU HAVE DONE WHILST WORKING HERE?

People from all areas now call me to ask questions about how to make lifts viable for Shabbat. I have sort of become the 'Shabbos lift expert' now! I feel honoured to be in a position where I can help with this sort of stuff. I would think that's one of the most honourable things that I've been able to do in my time here.

A standout project is the new Holocaust Memorial at Bushey New Cemetery, for its simple

design with magnificent depth. Also, construction of the new Wembley United Synagogue was particularly satisfying, since it helped that community meet its needs.

WHAT HAVE YOU LEARNT ABOUT JUDAISM THROUGH WORKING AT THE US?

I enjoyed my job from the first minute, but also felt completely out of my depth! I have read a lot and done research. I sat with Rabbis and the Dayanim of the London Beth Din who have helped me understand the intricacies of *halacha*.

I have also learnt a lot about Jewish life in general. Before I joined the US, I had only been to half a dozen cemeteries. Now I go to them all the time, which was foreign to me at first, as we don't do burials in my community [Lali is Sikh]. It has given me a different way of looking at the end of life and I've really appreciated that.

The other thing that resonates with me is that our staff meetings always start with a *Dvar Torah* (Torah thought), and I always relate it to my own religion. I find many similarities in the intent of the stories in the Torah, and this gives me great pleasure.

A Pesach Tail

Tannaim and their Cities: Part 30 | Rabbi Yehuda ben Beteira

This series of articles takes a closer look at the Tannaim (Sages of the Mishnaic era) mentioned in the Talmud (Sanhedrin 32b) and the locations which served as their Torah centres.



**DAVID
FREI**

US Director of External
and Legal Services and
Registrar of the London
Beth Din

A non-Jewish Aramean met with Rabbi Yehuda ben Beteira and boasted about his visits to Yerushalayim (Jerusalem), where he would enjoy eating the Paschal lamb on Seder Night (Pesachim 3b). The Torah only allows this offering to be eaten by Jews.

Rabbi Yehuda asked him whether he had eaten the lamb's tail and having been answered in the negative, pressed his Aramean visitor to insist on eating the tail on his next trip, as this was the greatest delicacy of the offering.

The Aramean duly demanded the tail when next at the Temple, not knowing that the lamb's tail was offered on the altar and not available for human consumption. On his insistence that a great Rabbi had suggested he eat the tail, the Temple authorities investigated his status resulting in their exposing the eager gourmand as an impostor. They were so impressed with Rabbi Yehuda's wisdom that they sent him a message; "Greetings to you, Rabbi Yehuda ben Beteira as you are in Netzivin, yet your net is spread in Yerushalayim."

The *Tosafists* (early rabbinic commentators on the Talmud) ask why Rabbi Yehuda did not make

the trip himself to partake of the Pesach offering. They offer three possible answers. First, he may not have had any land in Israel. Secondly, he may, as a result of old age, have been incapable of approaching the Temple on foot, this providing an exemption for those who would otherwise be obliged to participate in the Temple festivities on the Three Pilgrim Festivals, Pesach, Shavuot and Succot.

The third suggestion was that his hometown, Netzivin, lay outside the boundaries of the Holy Land, this providing another exemption from making the trip.

These answers of *Tosafot* attract much discussion and in particular, Rabbi Yehuda Rosanes (1657-1727) in his commentary on the first

One of the exemptions was not owning land in the Land of Israel. The question was posed as to how any Jew could be deemed not to have owned land in the country, being a descendant of those who entered the land in Joshua's conquest?

chapter of Rambam's *Laws of the Korban Pesach* (the Paschal Offering) takes issue with these alleged exemptions.

One of the exemptions was not owning land in the Land of Israel. The question was posed as to how any Jew could be deemed not to have owned land in the country, being a descendant of those who entered the land in Joshua's conquest?

An ingenious answer is given by the Vilna Gaon (1720-1797). The Prophet Yechezkel (Ezekiel, chapter 37) tells of a visit to a valley full of dry bones and being told by God to revive them. This passage is the Haftarah read on Shabbat Chol HaMoed Pesach. Although according to an opinion in the Talmud (Sanhedrin 92b) this did not actually happen but was a vision with a profound message of redemption, other opinions cited there assert that the incident actually took place. They say these were the bones of thousands of people from the tribe of Ephraim who broke out of Egypt prematurely, 30 years before the Exodus, and were slaughtered in attempting to enter Israel. Rabbi Yehuda ben Beteira is quoted in that Talmudic passage as saying he was one of their descendants.

If this is the case, says the Vilna Gaon, it explains how Rabbi Yehuda had no entitlement to land in Israel as this was only allotted to those who left Egypt during the Exodus.

THE TRIBE WEEKLY

PARASHAT SHEMOT

5-6 JANUARY | 11 TEVET

Take Your Shoes Off!



SOPHIE HARRIS

Youth Director at Magen Avot Synagogue

This week we begin a whole new Book of the Torah! In this week's parasha, we have the famous story of Moshe (Moses) encountering God at the burning bush. Who tells him: "Remove your shoes from your feet, because the site upon which you stand is sacred ground" (Shemot 3:5).

Nowadays, we pray in shul with our shoes on, but in this situation, Moshe stands barefoot before God. We see a similar situation in Sefer Yehoshua (Joshua, 5:15), when an angel appears to Yehoshua and tells him to take off his shoes as he is standing in a holy spot, and with

the kohanim (priests) in the *Beit Hamikdash* (Temple) who had to serve barefoot – even outside in the cold weather!

Why did Moshe have to take off his shoes? It seems that there must be a deeper lesson we can learn from this action.

The Torah commentators Malbim, Kli Yakar and Rabbeinu Bachye speak about shoes representing the earth, or the material world. They protect our feet, allowing us to tread the soil - to walk, hike, run and more. But in a place of spirituality, they become inappropriate. By taking them off, God was requesting of Moshe to forget about his physical existence, and to enter a conversation with Him. The burning bush, too, represented God telling Moshe to look deeper than just the physical world, recognising that He is in charge of it all.

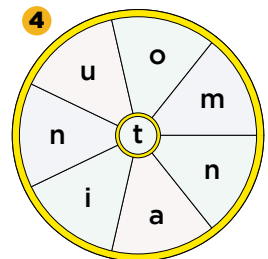
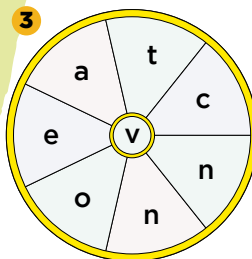
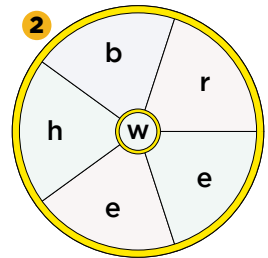
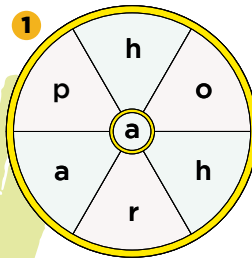
Rav Shraga Pollack (1877-1911) delves further into this idea. He writes that when a person is wearing shoes, they can walk wherever they wish. But when someone is barefoot, suddenly they must think about every step they take. They cannot walk freely anymore but must look in front of themselves to protect their feet.

This is the image of *kedusha* (holiness) that we learn from the Book of Shemot. We learn from Moshe taking off his shoes that the most beautiful life is one where we do not simply run without looking, but instead assess our actions. We treat each action as if it is precious, and decide accordingly where, and how, we 'walk'.

A life of *kedusha* is a life of mindfulness. Let's learn to feel the impact of our lives and actions as sensitively as if we were barefoot.

Word Wheels

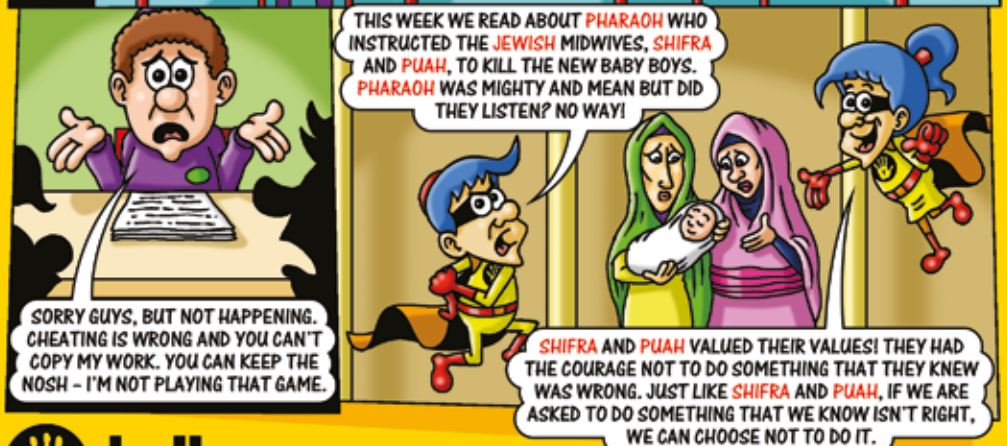
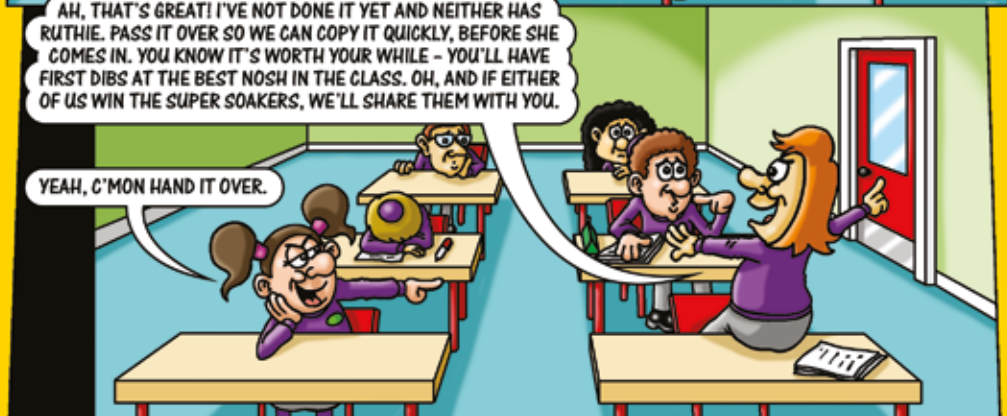
Which word can you make using ALL the letters in each these wheels, related to the Book of Shemot? How many other words can you make from the wheel?





THE TRIBE SCRIBE

SHEMOT: RIGHT ANSWERS!



tribe
www.tribeuk.com

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.