



May 19, 2018

ה סיון תשע"ח

Parashat Bamidbar – Numbers 1:1-4:20 - במדבר

Stone – p 726 Hertz – p 568 Etz Hayim – p 769

Haftarah – Hosea 2:1-22 - הושע ב

Stone – p 1180 Hertz – p 582 Etz Hayim – p 787

Kiddush is sponsored by Sisterhood

Talmud Class—5:15 PM; **Minchah**—6:30 PM; **Seudah Sh'lishit**;

Arvit—9:00 PM at B'nai Amoona

Sunday, May 20—1st Day Shavuot

Exodus 19:1-20:23 – p 1146; Stone p 400; Hertz p 290; Etz Hayim p 436

Maftir: Numbers 28:26-31 - p 1149; Stone p 892; Hertz p 696; Etz Hayim p 932

Haftarah: Ezekiel 1:1-28, 3:12 – p 1149; Stone p 1228; Hertz p 1027; Etz Hayim p 1321

Monday, May 21—2nd Day Shavuot

Megillat Ruth – Stone p 1269

Deuteronomy 15:19-16:17 - p 1144; Stone p 1018; Hertz p 814; Etz Hayim p 1080

Maftir: Numbers 28:26-31 – p 1149; Stone p 892; Hertz p 696; Etz Hayim p 932

Haftarah: Habakuk – 2:20-3:19 - p 1151; Stone p 1229; Hertz p 1032; Etz Hayim 1326

Yizkor

TRADITIONAL CONGREGATION

Rabbi Seth D Gordon – Rabbi.Gordon@yahoo.com

Rabbi Ephraim Zimand z"l, Emeritus

Marian S. Gordon, Executive Director – tradcong@sbcglobal.net

DAILY SERVICE TIMES

Shabbat—9:00 AM & **6:30 PM**

Sunday—8:30 AM

Monday –Friday—7:00 AM & 6:30 PM

Board of Directors:

Kenneth H. Bohm, President

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Florence Schachter, Education Vice President

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Sid Bennett

Shelah Feldman

Bill Gold

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Steven Puro

Dina Rinder

Iris Salsman

Jerry Tullman

Jeff Weisman

Justin Zeid

Traditional Congregation welcomes new members. If someone you know would like to receive membership information, please contact Membership VP Elaine Farkas at 954-558-1159.

On This Week's Torah Portion – Bamidbar

"We Don't Rely on Miracles"

Bamidbar is called the "Book of Numbers" in English, and in the Rabbinic literature as well it is sometimes referred to as *Sefer haPekudim* / the Book of Censuses. Abarbanel points out several unusual features of this census: First, why did they need a census at all. They had just had a census a year earlier (in *parashat Ki Tisa*) shortly after leaving Egypt. And somehow, miraculously (?), the number came out exactly the same in both counts.

Abarbanel takes a naturalistic approach to both questions. Let me consider the second one first. Abarbanel notes that both censuses counted every male from 20 and up, but the first census (which was accomplished by collecting ½ shekel from each eligible male, then counting the shekels, then multiplying by 2) included the Levites (since *everyone* was required to give the ½ shekel) while in the second census the Levites are specifically excluded from the main census and were counted separately. Of course, in the year between the two counts, there must have been a number of 19-year-olds who were excluded the first time, but turned 20 in the interim. Abarbanel claims that this number exactly matched the number of Levites who were excluded in the second census. (The reason the Levites were excluded in the second count, but not the first is that at this point in the narrative the Levites have been selected to do the service of the Tabernacle, and were exempt from military service.)

This leaves two questions unanswered. First, did nobody die during that first year? Taking a naturalistic approach, it would seem that in a nation of slaves who had been beaten and abused, and were now being subjected to the hardships of a desert trek, there would have been some weak stragglers who might have perished. There are a couple of possibilities here: Either Abarbanel does discuss this, but R. Kasnett left the discussion out of his compendium, or there is a Rabbinic tradition that in fact nobody died during the first year. If the latter were the case I would think that Abarbanel would have mentioned it to answer this first question, but again, R. Kasnett may have left it out.

The second question is, how did it happen that the number of 19-year-olds coming of age was *exactly the same* as the number of Levites (or the number of Levites + number of deaths)? This in itself must be miraculous! I'm not sure that a purely naturalistic approach works even for this somewhat simpler question.

When we get to Abarbanel's first question, we have a bit of a deeper philosophical problem. *Abarbanel explains that the nation was about to enter the Land of Israel, which would have to be conquered militarily. Just as a king would take a careful census of his available troops before embarking on a military campaign, the Torah specifically states that Moshe counted all males "from twenty years of age and up, everyone who is fit to go out to the army in Israel."*

They [the tribal leaders] would have to assume that they could not rely on miracles in the battles to conquer Eretz Yisrael, and they needed to conduct themselves as any commander of a battalion would.

There is a general Talmudic principle that "we do not rely on miracles." We don't gratuitously put ourselves in dangerous situations and assume that Gd will bail us out. If we find ourselves in danger, we take any natural way out of that situation, recognizing that Gd is the one who has provided the exit. One is reminded of the story of the man who is complaining that he never wins the lottery. Gd tells him, "Meet Me halfway – buy a ticket!!"

The principle here, and it is enunciated very forcefully by Ramban, is that Gd tries to minimize the miraculous. At the splitting of the sea, which in some ways is considered the greatest miracle of the entire Exodus story, Gd has Moshe raise his staff (i.e. there had to be some action from the human side) and then He caused a "strong east wind" to blow all night to dry out the seabed. The flip side of this is, there has to be input from humans to actuate the miracle. The sea didn't actually split, despite the "strong east wind" and Moshe's staff, until Nachshon ben Aminadav plunged into the water

In the case of Moshe and the tribal leaders, even though they had been explicitly promised Divine intervention in routing the Canaanites, they go through all the natural procedures to fight the Canaanites. Indeed, when the people come to Moshe and propose that they send scouts to reconnoiter the Land, Moshe agrees. Despite the disastrous outcome, the Rabbis mainly criticize the people for making their proposal in a disorderly way, not for making the proposal in the first place, for it was a natural thing to do prior to a military campaign.

I think the upshot of this consideration is this. Gd created a world with laws of nature, regularities, but He also created human beings, with free will. Left to itself, the nature of life is to grow and expand, to become more integrated and better able to reflect the Gdliness that is at the basis of all creation. Our free will is perhaps the greatest reflection of Gdliness that there can possibly be, because perhaps Gd's most important quality is His absolute freedom from any boundaries or constraints. If we use our free will in accord with Gd's Will, then our every action will be in accord with the natural tendency of life to grow. Gd will not need to intervene in an overtly miraculous fashion. It is only when human error piles up and threatens to overwhelm life, as was the case in Egypt, that Gd needs to intervene to get us back on track. We look forward to the Messianic Age where all human action will be aligned with Gd's Will and our lives will be supported in every detail by the workings of nature.

Shabbat Shalom!
Rafi Rabinoff

Chag Shavuot Sameach!

Shabbat, May 19—Erev Shavuot

Rabbi's Talmud Class 5:15 PM

Minchah 6:30 PM at Traditional

Candlelighting: 8:50 PM

West County Tikkun Leil Shavuot 7:00 PM (see flyer)

Arvit 9:00 PM at B'nai Amoona

Sunday, May 20—Day 1

Shacharit: 9:00 AM

Minchah/Arvit 7:45 PM

Candlelighting 8:50 PM

Monday, May 21—Day 2

Shacharit 9:00 AM with chanting of

Megillat Ruth and *Yizkor*.

Minchah /Arvit 7:45 PM

PLEASE JOIN US FOR
A WEST COUNTY

TIKKUN LEIL SHAVUOT



A night of study, prayer, music, community, Schmoozing and Noshing facilitated by the Clergy and Education Staff* of B'nai Amoona, Shaare Emeth, Shir Hadash, Temple Emanuel, Temple Israel, Traditional, and United Hebrew and St Louis Jewish Federation, Center for Jewish Learning.

**with special presentations by Rabbi Or Rose, Director, Center for Global Judaism, Hebrew College, and Dr. Judith Rosenbaum, Executive Director of the Jewish Women's Archive*

SATURDAY, MAY 19

Minchah 6:00 pm

Program 7:00 pm - 12:00 am

**Congregation B'nai Amoona
324 S. Mason Rd | St. Louis, MO | 63141**

Join us for all or part of the evening. Everyone is welcome.

Please bring a food or personal care item as a donation to the Harvey Kornblum Jewish Food Pantry.

RSVP at www.bnaiamoona.com

Questions? Contact Amy Maupin at 314-576-9990 x131



UPCOMING EVENTS

Celebrate Shavuot!

Shabbat, May 19—Erev Shavuot

Rabbi's Talmud Class 5:15 PM; Minchah 6:30 PM; Candlelighting 8:50 PM

West County Tikkun Leil Shavuot 7:00 PM at B'nai Amoona

Arvit 9:00 PM at B'nai Amoona

Sunday, May 20—Day 1

Shacharit: 9:00 AM; Minchah/Arvit 7:45 PM; Candlelighting 8:50 PM

Monday, May 21—Day 2

Shacharit 9:00 AM with chanting of Megillat Ruth and Yizkor

Minchah/Arvit 7:45 PM

Shabbat, May 26 ***Kiddush and seudah sh'lishit are sponsored by Steve Pessin*** in memory of his mother, Miriam Pessin.

Sunday, May 27 Stone dedication for Miriam Pessin, 10:30 AM, Chesed Shel Emeth Cemetery on White Road.

Sunday, May 27 Jewish War Veterans Memorial Day Program, 11:00 AM at United Hebrew Congregation.

Sunday, June 3 Shedding Light on Alzheimer's: A Jewish Perspective, 9:15 AM—12:45 PM, Shaare Emeth. For caregivers and families facing Alzheimer's disease, memory loss or dementia. Register at 800-272-3900 or www.alz.org/greatermissouri

Please support our Capital Campaign!! Information has been mailed out and is also available in the May/June Newsletter. Please give generously and help us pave the way to our future!!

We're looking for...YOU—to sponsor a Kiddush! Call Marian, 314-576-5230 to reserve your date. Not ready to sponsor but would like to contribute to offset our Kiddush costs? It's easy to do—you can mail your donation to Traditional (note: Kiddush Fund in memo) or donate online at <https://www.traditional-congregation.org/donate> and select Kiddush Fund Donation. Thank you!



Visit our website www.traditional-congregation.org

PRAYER

O God,

We all stood at the mountain's base

And swore ourselves to Your commands.

Though Moses stuttered horribly

We all listened with the utmost care to every
Torah word.

It was so good to be gone from Egypt!

And *Mitzvot* are slow to be done.

Be patient with our outward hesitation.

We have not forgotten the Agreement;

You are not alone.

Danny Siegel

THOUGHT FOR THE MOMENT OF SILENCE

In every conceivable manner, the family is the link to our past,
and the bridge to our future.

Alex Haley