

DEBAR TORAH by RABBI ROHDE

Marching In Formation and Group Solidarity

The Torah sees its ideal portrayal of the way the Israelites moved about from place to place - in the desert wilderness and also as they entered the Land they were to conquer - as a march in precise military formation, with organization of subsidiary units by tribe and clan, even with military standards and banners for the different units. Although I imagine there must have been exceptions - some points at which walking this way over dry sandy desert terrain or in circumstances where they would have stood out as a target from above - the question remains as to why a strict military march in formation is the Torah's ideal. Similar questions are asked about military marching today. Indeed, almost every military trains with formal marching and "drill practice." Marching around in formation today probably has even less to do with fighting technique, and yet most modern armies continue with it. What made this strict formational march the Torah's ideal of an "army"?

Well, for one thing, such strict formations allow vast numbers of men to cohere together and act together as if they were one large unit. The organization by clan reflects that they all were to see themselves as one large family, a unit held together by relational bonds which were actually organic. Of course, seeing a group of this size coming their way would have impressed their observers, and the tightness of the organization would have allowed for the amassing of a greater quantity of men in a smaller area, allowing them to overrun their enemies by sheer mass of forces. But although the numbers of troops Bemidbar gives are impressive (one wonders how they could amass so many while traveling through arid desert!), what is supposed to impress us is the strict formation which symbolizes the group's cohesion. One study I saw compared marching men to packs of coyotes howling at each other and even to schools of dolphins which jump and twirl together! Men in groups evaluate single assailants as less threatening. So some marching around is a kind of instinctive "pack behavior." Political "protest marches" in democratic cultures today continue to make use of this "pack" reinforcing effect of the amassing of an army. And aside from that, some of this pack behavior had real military applications, as when Greek armies carried their shields and spears so that the shield protected oneself and one's neighbor, when the front-lines protected the rear-guard, or when the concentration of a "pack" of a mass of men allowed for overwhelming an enemy.

But the description of the marching in Bemidbar is much more formal than what we could call a "gang" or "pack." Indeed, I have often remarked that there is no particular mention of having to march "in-step" in the Torah! Perhaps the Heavenly Hosts of Angels in the prophets were more in-step, according to the way I understand the Prophets, but this didn't apply so much to the Israelites! (This is why I never got too upset at the out-of-step Torah processions at Shearith Israel.) But what is on prominent display in these formal processions are notions of group solidarity and group protection. It's more subtle than a "pack," more formalized and symbolized, becoming not only militarized but "politicized." These are not mercenaries but clans of freemen marching with their own standards together. Not only the pride of the whole but the pride and glory of each clan is on display, boosting the confidence and morale of the unit and the whole. The march in formation depicted here at the beginning of Numbers is supposed to inspire us with the esprit de corps all of us Children of Israel are supposed to have, with group solidarity. And this does not apply just militarily or when we are in danger, in Israel or in the Diaspora. This massive sense of group solidarity is supposed to make us instinctively help each other when we are in need and hence feel safe and confident together to grow and flourish as individuals. When all of us move together in lock-step, each man can feel confident that his fellow has his back.



CONGREGATION SHEARITH ISRAEL
The Spanish & Portuguese Synagogue

Shabbat Bemidbar

May 19-20, 2023 | 29 Iyar 5783

SHABBAT SCHEDULE

Kaplan: p. 654 | Haftarah: p. 1262

Hertz: p. 567 | Haftarah: p. 948

Candle Lighting | 7:51 pm

Friday Evening Services | 7:00 pm | Main Sanctuary

Zemirot | 8:15 am / **Shahrit** | 9:00 am | Main Sanctuary

Youth Groups/Tot Shabbat | Meet at 10:00 am | Fidanque Youth Room

Jr. Congregation | 10:30 am | Small Synagogue | Led this week by Ari Sherizen, Adam Jackson, and Isaac Haberman

Kiddush | following services | *Kiddush Supporter: Julia & Yair Cohen, in memory of Julia's father, Yehezkel Moalem*

Shabbat Afternoon Class | 7:05 pm | Rabbi Soloveichik

Evening Services | 7:50 pm | Main Sanctuary

Habdala | 8:51 pm

Rosh Hodesh Sivan begins on Saturday night. Shabuot begins on Thursday night.

SHABUOT SCHEDULE

Ereb Shabuot – Thursday Evening, May 25

Prepare Erub Tabshilin | before sunset, 8:14 pm

Candles | 7:56 pm

Evening Services | 7:45 pm

Rabbi Soloveichik's Shabuot Lecture | 11:00 pm

Shabuot I – Friday, May 26

Zemirot | 8:15 am / Shahrit | 9:00 am

Azharot Reading: Intro & 1st Part | 7:15 pm

Minha/Arbit Services | 7:45 pm

Candles | 7:57 pm

Shabuot II – Shabbat, May 27

Zemirot | 8:15 am / Shahrit | 9:00 am

Girls Reading Book of Ruth | 11:25 am

Azharot Reading: 2nd Part | 7:25 pm

Minha/Arbit Services | 8:00 pm

Habdala | 8:58 pm

2023 SPRING FUNDRAISER

Don't Miss Next Week's FINALE!

WORTH A THOUSAND WORDS:

Seven Iconic Images in the History of Israel,
and the Stories Behind Them

An Important 7-Part Virtual Series by Rabbi Meir Soloveichik

Pre-Shabuot FINALE | Tuesday, May 23 | 7:30 pm

“The Blind Boy and the Image:

David Rubenstein's Favorite Photo and the Future of Israel”

Sign up at shearithisrael.org/giving/SpringFundraiser2023



COMMUNITY ANNOUNCEMENTS

Mazal tob to **Kiki Bregman** on celebrating her bat mitzvah this coming Sunday. Congratulations to her parents, **Anthony & Malaika Bregman**, to her grandmother, **Viviane Bregman**, and to the entire family.

Mazal tob to **Lila Bulow** on celebrating her bat mitzvah this coming Sunday. Congratulations to her parents **Harris and Heather Bulow**, and to her grandparents, George Bulow and **Lucienne Carasso Bulow**.

Mazal tob to **Caryl Englander** upon her grandson, Lyon, becoming a Bar Mitzvah.

Mazal tob to **Judy & Dr. Marty Grumet** upon the birth of a granddaughter, Aluma Hallel, born to their children, Avi & Leah Grumet, in Jerusalem.

Mazal tob to **Aviva Roumani & Ethan Mackin** upon the birth of their first child, **Ronan Joseph Mackin**.

WEEKDAY SERVICE TIMES

Mornings: Sunday: 8:05 am | Monday-Wednesday: 7:05 am

Evenings: Sunday-Wednesday: 6:30 pm

SHABUOT

Rabbi Soloveichik's Shabuot Lecture

Shabuot night, Thursday, May 25 | 11:00 pm

“King David, the British Monarchy,
and the Grandmother of King Charles III”

Come for the Torah, stay for the cheesecake!

Sponsor the lecture at shearithisrael.org/shabuot5783.

Girls' & Young Women Book of Ruth Reading

Shabuot, Shabbat, May 27

Sponsor Kiddush in Honor of our Readers

Shabuot, Shabbat, May 27 | Following the reading

Sponsor at shearithisrael.org/events/ruth-reading5783.

COMING UP

Memorial Day at Chatham Square Cemetery

Memorial Day, Monday, May 29 | 55 St. James Place

5th Annual *Smash The Stigma* Event

Presented by Shearith Israel's Caring Connection

Wednesday, May 31 | 7:00 pm | In Person at Shearith Israel

For panelist details & to register, visit shearithisrael.org/smash-the-stigma.

Young Professionals Shabbat Dinner

NEW DATE: Friday night, June 9 | For ages 21-35

Services at 7:00 pm | Dinner at 8:00 pm

Dinner Committee: Isaac Haberman, Devorah Goldstein, Ariel Bengio,
and Daniel De Sola Marks

Register at shearithisrael.org/yp-june-dinner.

Graduation Kiddush & Scroll of Honor

Shabbat, June 17 | Following Services

Oh, the time has come to celebrate

All the graduates, both small and great!

From pre-school to PhDs they've come,

And we're so proud of every one!

Submit your graduate's details at shearithisrael.org/grad-kiddush2023.