

Shvilei Pinches

Parshas Bamidbor

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Parshas Bamidbor 5771

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The Arrangement of the Flags Surrounding the Mishkan Duplicated the Pattern Established by Yaakov concerning his burial

In this week's parsha, parshas Bamidbor, the arrangement of the flags surrounding the Mishkan, the sanctuary in the desert, is described. The twelve tribes were divided into four major flags and encampments: the flag of the camp of Yehudah, the flag of the camp of Reuven, the flag of the camp of Dan and the flag of the camp of Ephraim. As it is written (Bamidbor 2, 2): **“איש על דגלו באותות לבית אבותם יחנו בני ישראל מנגד סביב—each man at his flag according to the signs of their father's house, at a distance surrounding the Tent of Meeting (Ohel Moed) shall they encamp.**

It is only appropriate, therefore, that we examine this subject to some small degree. Why did HKB"H command that the Mishkan be surrounded by the four tribal encampments? To begin with, we find that Bnei Yisroel yearned for these flags and divisions after seeing the divisions of the malochim at the time of Matan Torah. The arrangement and divisions of the malochim is depicted in the Midrash (Bamidbor Rabbah 2, 3):

“בשעה שנגלה הקב"ה על הר סיני, ירדו עמו כ"ב רבבות של מלאכים, שנאמר (תהלים סח יח) רכב אלקים רבותים אלפי שנאן, והיו כולם עשויים דגלים דגלים שנאמר (שיר השירים ה י) דגול מרבבה, כיון שראו אותן ישראל שהם עשויים דגלים דגלים, התחילו מתאווים לדגלים, אמרו אלואי כך אנו נעשים דגלים כמותן... וכן הוא אומר (תהלים כ ו) נרננה בישועתך וגו' [ובשם אלקינו נדגול], אמר להם הקב"ה, מה נתאויתם לעשות דגלים, חייכם שאני ממלא משאלותיכם (שם) ימלא ה' כל משאלותיך, מיד הודיע הקב"ה אותם לישראל ואמר למשה, לך עשה אותם דגלים כמו שנתאוו.”

At the time of the Revelation at Sinai, two hundred and twenty thousand angels descended with HKB"H arranged according to divisions and flags. Upon witnessing this magnificent display and array, Yisroel began yearning to have similar divisions. HKB"H acquiesced to their request and immediately informed Moshe to make the arrangements for the divisions and flags that they requested.

This prompts us to inquire: (a) what is the lofty matter of the angels' divisions which evoked Yisroel's jealousy and yearning and which resulted in their divisions in the desert wilderness? (b) Why were Yisroel divided up specifically into four divisions headed by four lead tribes—Yehudah, Reuven, Ephraim and Dan?

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Let us begin our efforts by presenting Rashi's commentary (Bamidbor 2, 2): "באותות לבית: באות שמסר להם יעקב אביהם כשנשאווהו ממצרים, שנאמר (בראשית נ יב) ויעשו בניו לו כן כאשר צום, יהודה ויששכר וזבולן ישאווהו מן המזרח, וראובן ושמעון וגר מן הדרום וכו', —by the sign which their father Yaakov passed on to them when they carried him from Egypt... Yehudah and Yissaschar and Zevulun were instructed to be on his eastern side, Reuven and Shimon and Gad on the southern side etc., as it is stated in the Midrash Tanchuma on this parsha.

Here is Rashi's source, the Midrash Tanchuma (12):

"איש על דגלו, זה שאמר הכתוב (איוב לו ג) אשא דעי למרחוק ולפועלי אתן צדק, לא היה צריך לומר אלא איש על דגלו יחנו בני ישראל, ומה תלמוד לומר באותות, אלא בשעה שנפטר יעקב אבינו מן העולם, אמר לבניו (בראשית מז ל) ושכבתי עם אבותי, חזר על כל בניו וברכך ופוקדן, אמר להן, כשתטלו אותי, ביראה ובכבוד טלו אותי, ולא יגע אדם אחר במטתי, ולא אחד מן המצרים... וכן הוא אומר (שם נ יב) ויעשו בניו לו כן כאשר צום וישאו אותו בניו ארצה כנען...

והיאך צום, אמר להם, יהודה ויששכר וזבולן יטענו מטתי מן המזרח, ראובן ושמעון וגר יטענו מן הדרום, דן ואשר ונפתלי יטענו מן הצפון, בנימין אפרים ומנשה יטענו מן המערב, יוסף אל יטעון, למה שהוא מלך ואתם צריכין לחלוק לו כבוד, לוי אל יטעון, למה שעתידין לישא את הארון, ומי שטוען את ארונו של חי העולמים לא ישא ארונו של מת, ואם תעשו כן וטענתם את מטתי כשם שצויתי אתכם, הקב"ה עתיד להשרות אתכם דגלים דגלים.

כיון שנפטר טענו אותו כשם שצוה שיטענו אותו, מנין שכן כתיב, ויעשו בניו לו כן כאשר צום, מה כתיב אחריו, וישאו אותו בניו ארצה כנען, כיון שיצאו ישראל ממצרים אמר הקב"ה, הרי השעה שיעשו דגלים, כשם שבשרן אביהן שהן עתידין לעשות דגלים דגלים, מיד אמר הקב"ה למשה, משה עשה אותם דגלים לשמי.

מיד עמד משה והתחיל מיצר, אמר עכשיו עתידה מחלוקת להינתן בין השבטים, אמר, אומר לשבט יהודה לשרות במזרח, הוא אומר לא אי אפשי לי אלא בדרום, וכן אחרים כיוצא בו שבט ושבט, אמר ליה הקב"ה למשה, משה מה איכפת לך, הם אינן צריכין לך בדבר הזה, שמעצמן הן מכירין דירתן, למה שצוואת אביהן בידם היאך לשרות בדגלים, איני מחדש עליהם דבר שכבר יש להם טכסין מן יעקב אביהן, כשם שהקיפו את מטתו כך יקיפו את המשכן, מנין שכך כתיב איש על דגלו".

When Yaakov Avinu passed from this world, he blessed each of his sons and gave them specific instructions regarding how they were to carry him to the Land of Cenaar. He emphasized that they do so with reverence and respect and that no one touch his bier—especially none of the Egyptians. . . He specified which three sons were to stand on the eastern side, which three on the southern side, which three on the northern side and which three on the western side. Yosef was not to carry the bier, since it was not fitting for a king to do so; Levi was also not to carry the bier, since his tribe was destined to

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carry the holy Ark—and certainly it was not fitting for the bearers of the sacred, eternal Ark to carry the casket of a corpse. (Ephraim and Menashe completed the count of twelve in place of Yosef and Levi.) Yaakov promised them that in return for fulfilling his instructions, HKB"H would rest His Presence upon them in similar divisions, in the future.

They honored his commands and HKB"H fulfilled the promise. Moshe, however, feared that these divisions would stir up controversy. HKB"H told Moshe not to concern himself with such worries; each tribe will know and recognize its proper position based on their father's instructions. I have not instituted anything new for them in this matter—their positions are in accordance with the way they surrounded Yaakov's bier; they will surround the Mishkan in a similar fashion.

Thus, we have learned an astonishing fact. During the entire forty year sojourn in the desert--during which time they completed forty-two distinct journeys, on their way from Egypt to Eretz Yisroel--they travelled and camped according to the very same pattern and order as they had done while transporting Yaakov Avinu after he passed away. We must endeavor to understand why Yaakov Avinu arranged them in this specific order; furthermore, his instructions conveyed to them that they would follow this same pattern and array during their travels in the desert wilderness.

"If You See Me Taken from You It Shall Be So for You"

We can propose a wonderful explanation based on the description we find concerning the manner in which Elisha took leave of his holy teacher Eliyahu HaNovi—who ascended to the heavens in a whirlwind (Melachim 2 2, 9): **“וַיְהִי כַעֲבָרָם וְאֵלֵיהֶוּ אָמַר אֵל אֵלִישָׁע, שְׂאֵל מֵהָ: אַעֲשֶׂה לְךָ בְּטֶרֶם אֶלְקָח מֵעִמָּךְ, וַיֹּאמֶר אֵלִישָׁע וַיְהִי נָא פִי שְׁנַיִם בְּרוּחַךְ אֵלַי, וַיֹּאמֶר הַקִּשִׁית לְשֹׂאֵל אִם תִּרְאֶה אוֹתִי לֹקַח מֵאִתְּךָ יְהִי לְךָ כֵּן וְאִם אֵין לָא יְהִיָּה”**—**As they were crossing, Eliyahu said to Elisha, “Request what I should do for you before I am taken away from you.” Elisha said, “May twice as much as your spirit be mine.” He said, “You have made a difficult request. If you see me taken from you, it shall be so for you; but if you do not, then it will not happen.”**

The commentators are perplexed by the following: (a) how could Elisha request from his teacher, Eliyahu, two times his spirit? After all, a teacher is incapable of passing on more than he actually possesses. As the Gemoreh states so poetically (Niddoh 62:): **“רַבִּי לֹא שִׁנָּה”**—**רַבִּי חִיָּיא מִנָּא לִיהָ**—if Rebbe did not teach it to him, where did Rabbi Chiya get it from?! So, how could Eliyahu possibly pass on to Elisha twice as much as he possessed? (b) What is the meaning of Eliyahu's advice: **“אִם תִּרְאֶה אוֹתִי לֹקַח מֵאִתְּךָ יְהִי לְךָ כֵּן”**— **If you see me taken from you, it shall be so for you?** Why was this a necessary condition in order for Elisha to receive twice the amount of Eliyahu's spirit?

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A legitimate explanation can be provided based on the writings of Rabeinu Nissim of Gerondi in Droschos HaRan (Drush 8). It is a well-known principle that even the greatest Torah scholars are limited in their Torah knowledge by their physical bodies. Additionally, according to our blessed sages, Torah scholars continue their occupation with Torah study in the heavenly academy after they depart this world—each at his own appropriate level.

As a general rule, a student can only learn from his Rabbi while the Rabbi is still alive in this world; after the Rabbi's departure to the next world, he can no longer continue to learn from him. Nevertheless, Elisha longed to continue learning and begged of Eliyahu HaNovi: "ויהי נא פי שנים ברוחך אלי" -- **"May twice as much as your spirit be mine."** He requested a double portion—not only to learn from Eliyahu's knowledge in this world but to also merit acquiring from Eliyahu's Torah that he would learn after leaving this world, in the heavenly academy above.

Eliyahu's response to this request was: "אם תראה אותי לוקח מאתך יהי לך כן" -- **If you see me taken from you, it shall be so for you.** In other words, he told Elisha that this was only possible if he would be with him to witness Eliyahu's unusual departure to the heavenly world above. For, one's departure from this world constitutes an intermediate stage between this world and the next; by still possessing a physical body, one is still connected to this world; yet, due to one's being en route to the world above, one is already connected to the next world. So, by being with Eliyahu at this critical juncture in time, Elisha could, indeed, acquire a double portion—a portion of his Torah in this world and a portion of his Torah from the world above.

To Always Picture in One's Mind the Moment of Separation

In a similar vein, a chassid of the great Rabbi Meir of Premishlan, zy"א, expressed his desire to experience the same excitement and sense of enlightenment that he experienced while in the Rebbe's presence even while back in his own home. The Rebbe explained that at the moment he took leave of the Rebbe, the student was overwhelmed by feelings of longing and desire; but, with time, those passions tended to subside. Therefore, Rabbi Meir advised the student to always picture in his mind the moment he left his Rebbe; this would help reinforce and maintain the strong bond between the student and his Rebbe even back in his own home.

He then employed this concept to explain Eliyahu's response to Elisha: "אם תראה אותי לוקח מאתך יהי לך כן" -- **If you see me taken from you, it shall be so for you.** In other words, Eliyahu was suggesting that Elisha constantly picture in his mind's eye the image of how Eliyahu was taken away heavenward in a fiery chariot and a whirlwind and the emotions experienced by Elisha at that moment. He was telling Elisha that this would help maintain the strong bond between them even after Eliyahu's ascent to the heavens. This

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can be understood as follows: by means of the passionate longing of the student, the teacher is able to continue influencing the student—even after ascending to the heavens.

This idea provides us with a beautiful explanation of the passage in parshas Vayigash (Bereishis 45, 27): **“וידברו אליו את כל דברי יוסף אשר דיבר אליהם, וירא את העגלות אשר שלח יוסף לשאת אותו ותחי רוח יעקב אביהם”**—and they related to him all the words of Yosef that he had spoken to them; and he saw the wagons that Yosef had sent to transport him; then the spirit of their father Yaakov was revived. Rashi comments: **“סימן מסר להם במה היה עוסק בשפירש ממנו בפרשת עגלה ערופה, זהו שנאמר: וירא את העגלות אשר שלח יוסף”**—Yosef gave his brothers a sign; when he separated from his father they were studying together the laws of the “eglah arufah,” the heifer whose neck was axed in the valley; the “agalos,” the wagons, were intended to remind his father of their last session together studying about the “eglah arufah.” (Note the similarity and association between the words “agalos” and “eglah.”) So, what message was Yosef conveying to his father, Yaakov, by alluding to their last study session together?

Based on what we have learned thus far, a method of remaining connected with one's teacher and his Torah, is to always remember the moment of separation and taking leave—when the emotions and longings are great. Therefore, Yosef was signifying to his father that he had not gone astray in Egypt; he never forgot that when he took leave of Yaakov, they were studying about the “eglah arufah” together. This was a convincing sign for Yaakov that Yosef had remained connected to his Torah and his kedushah.

Yaakov Avinu Paved the Way for Yisroel to Overcome the Influence of the Klipos in the Wilderness

Alas, we can rejoice at having gained some insight into Yaakov Avinu's tremendous wisdom and loftier purpose. He commanded his sons to transport him for burial in the precise order and array that they would travel and camp in the desert. After all, the midbor, the desert wilderness, is a place where the negative forces of impurity and the Klipos reign. This matter is explained by the Arizal in Shaar HaKavonos: **“והנה מקום הקליפה עצמה נקרא”**—the location of the negative forces of the klipah is referred to as a barren desert, a place of desolation, since it is not fit for inhabitants or for cultivation. Nevertheless, even in this place of desolation, the residence of the Klipos, Yisroel exhibited total faith in Hashem.

Certainly, during their forty year sojourn in the desert, Bnei Yisroel were at great risk of falling prey to the negative influences of the Klipos, chas v'shalom—especially after departing from Egypt where they had fallen to the forty-ninth level of tumah. Therefore, Yaakov Avinu felt it necessary to devise a method to insure his children's safe passage through this dangerous area. This was accomplished by instructing his children, the heads of the tribes, to transport him to burial according to the order and divisions that would

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prevail in the midbor. For, throughout their travels during their forty year stay in the desert wilderness, they would always replicate the order and formation instituted for transporting Yaakov to his burial. This would insure that they would always remember the emotional attachment they felt toward Yaakov when they left him and would guarantee their attachment to the kedushah that he transmitted to them.

Upon further reflection, we find that Yaakov Avinu commanded his sons to transport him in this manner—according to the divisions of their encampments: “ממצרים לארץ ישראל”—from Egypt to Eretz Yisroel—in order to bury him in the Meoras HaMachpelah. By so doing, he paved the way for his children, Yisroel, to travel in a similar formation when leaving: “ממצרים לארץ ישראל”—from Egypt to Eretz Yisroel. This strategy was devised to insure that they remained connected with his Torah and kedushah—just as when they parted from him--on their journey from Egypt to Eretz Yisroel.

Four Divisions Corresponding to the Four Divisions Surrounding the Throne of Glory

Continuing along this exalted path, we can suggest an even deeper explanation. The Zohar hakadosh on our parsha (118:) explains that HKB”H commanded the order of the four divisions and encampments to correspond to the four heavenly camps surrounding the Throne of Glory. This is described in the Pirkei D’Rabbi Eliezer (Chapter 4):

”ד’ כתות של מלאכי השרת מקלסין לפני הקב”ה, מחנה ראשונה מיכאל מימינו, מחנה שניה של גבריאל על שמאלו, מחנה שלישית של אוריאל מלפניו, מחנה רביעית של רפאל מלאחריו, ושכינתו של הקב”ה באמצע, והוא יושב על כסא רם ונשא”.

Four groups of ministering angels attend and praise HKB”H: First, Michael on His right; second, Gavriel on His left; third, Uriel in front of Him; fourth, Rephael behind Him; HKB”H’s Divine Presence rests in the middle; He sits atop His lofty Throne.

This is the basis for the formula instituted for the recitation of “Krias Shema” at bedtime: “בשם ה’ אלקי ישראל, מימיני מיכאל, ומשמאלי גבריאל, מלפני אוריאל, ומאחורי רפאל, ועל ראשי שכינת אל” Thus, we learn from the Zohar that the four flags and divisions representing the four tribal leaders—the flag of the division of Yehudah, the flag of the division of Reuven, the flag of the division of Dan and the flag of the division of Ephraim—correspond to the four divisions of angels surrounding HKB”H as He sits atop His Throne of Glory.

The Shla hakadosh finds a wonderful allusion to this association between the heavenly and earthly camps in the passuk (Tehillim 8, 2): “ה’ אדונינו מה אדני שמך בכל הארץ”—**Hashem, our Lord, how mighty is Your Name throughout the earth.** Here the angels express their amazement and reaction to the order of Yisroel’s divisions below on earth—which are reminiscent of the four heavenly divisions surrounding the Throne of Glory. For,

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the word אדי"ר consists of the first letters of the four tribal leaders whose banners represent each division: א'פרים ד'ן י'הודה ר'אובן.

The Ark Parallels the Throne of Glory Above

It seems that this also explains why HKB"H commanded Yisroel to camp around the Mishkan with their four banners in this same formation, as it is written: **"איש על דגלו -- באותות לבית אבותם יחנו בני ישראל מנגד סביב לאהל מועד יחנו" according to the signs of their father's house, at a distance surrounding the Tent of Meeting (Ohel Moed) shall they encamp.** We find the following explanation in the Midrash Tanchuma (Vayakhel 7):

"חביב הוא מעשה הארון ככסא הכבוד של מעלה, שנאמר (שמות טו) מכון לשבתך פעלת ה' מקדש וגו', שמקדש של מעלה מכוון כנגד בית המקדש של מטה, והארון מכוון כנגד כסא הכבוד של מעלה שנאמר (ירמיה יז יב) כסא כבוד מרום מראשון, ובאיזה מקום היה מקום מקדשנו, הוי פעלת ה' מקדש ה' כוננו יריך, אל תקרי מכון אלא מכוון כנגד כסא הכבוד."

This Tanchuma teaches us that the Sanctuary above parallels the Beis HaMikdosh below on earth; also, the Ark, the Aron, below parallels the Throne of Glory above. So, just as the Throne of Glory above is surrounded by four divisions of angels, it is only fitting that the Aron on earth—the parallel construct of the Throne above—should also be surrounded by four corresponding divisions. This is why HKB"H commanded the shevatim to surround Ohel Moed with their banners—to parallel the four heavenly divisions of angels surrounding the Throne of Glory.

I would like to propose my own explanation for why Yaakov instructed the holy shevatim to transport his bier according to the formation of the divisions in the midbor. The Gemoreh (Chullin 91:) expounds on the passuk in sefer Bereishis (28, 12): **"והנה מלאכי עולים: ויורדים בו - תנא עולין ומסתכלין בדיוקנו של מעלה ויורדין ומסתכלין בדיוקנו של מטה"**. Concerning Yaakov's dream of the ladder, the Gemoreh teaches that the angels would ascend to gaze upon his image above and then descend to gaze upon his image below. To clarify the matter, Rashi writes: **"בדיוקנו של מעלה, פרצוף אדם שבארבע חיות בדמות יעקב"**—his image above refers to the likeness of Yaakov engraved on the Throne of Glory. The image of man among the four creatures bearing the Throne of Glory is the image of Yaakov.

Now, we can suggest that Yaakov commanded his sons to transport his bier in the same formation as their future divisions in the desert so that they would always remember that his image is engraved in the Throne above. This is the reason the Gemoreh states (Taanit 5:): **"יעקב אבינו לא מת"**—**Yaakov Avinu never died**. In fact, he lives on forever on the Throne of Glory above. Therefore, it was fitting for the tribes to transport him while

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arranged in the formation of their banners and their divisions, since that formation corresponds to the four divisions of heavenly angels that surround the Throne of Glory.

This allows us a wonderful explanation for the following teaching in the Gemoreh (Berachot 8.): "מיום שחרב בית המקדש אין לו להקב"ה בעולמו אלא ד' אמות של הלכה בלבד"—since the destruction of the Beis HaMikdosh, HKB"H only has four cubits of halachah in His world. Rabbi Chaim, ztz"l, the brother of the Maharal of Prague, writes in his Iggeres HaTiyul: "גמר"א נוטריקון ג'בריאל מ'יכאל ר'פאל א'וריאל, מגיד שכל מי שעוסק בגמרא הנה מלאכי ה' סביב לו לשמרו מכל רע, מימינו מיכאל ומשמאלו גבריאל ומלפניו אוריאל ומאחוריו רפאל". The word גמר"א (Gemoreh) is an abbreviation for the names of the four angels that surround the Throne of Glory—ג'בריאל מ'יכאל ר'פאל א'וריאל (Gavriel, Michael, Rephael and Uriel). Seeing as anyone engaged in the study of Gemara is accompanied by the Shechinah, it goes without saying that the four divisions of angels that accompany the Divine Presence accompany him as well. These four divisions, symbolized by the word גמר"א - ג'בריאל מ'יכאל ר'פאל א'וריאל, protect him so that he may succeed in all his endeavors.

It is now quite apparent why our sages expressed this idea in precisely these terms: "מיום שחרב בית המקדש"—since the destruction of the Beis HaMikdosh, where the Aron in the Holy of Holies corresponded directly to the Throne of Glory—the Kiseh HaKovod—we all lament our great loss, the loss of the Kiseh HaKovod surrounded by four heavenly divisions. Nevertheless, even in the times after the destruction of the Beis HaMikdosh, we are comforted by the simple fact that: "אין לו להקב"ה בעולמו אלא ד' אמות של הלכה בלבד"—HKB"H still has four cubits of halachah—four cubits specifically, corresponding to the four heavenly camps of angels which watch over those who engage in Torah study. Thus, we find that it is as if one who is occupied in Torah study is actually in the Beis HaMikdosh in close proximity to the Kiseh HaKovod!