

# Parsha Ponders

Bamidbar / Shavuot | May 20, 2020 | 26 Iyar 5780

## *Revealing the facets of the King<sup>1</sup>*

איש על-דגלו באתת לבית אבתם יחנו בני ישראל מנגד סביב לאהל-מועד יחנו

The Children of Israel shall encamp, each person according to his flag, with signs according to their father's house. They shall encamp opposite and surrounding the Tent of Meeting<sup>2</sup>

A significant amount of this week's *parsha* describes the encampment of the Jewish people in the wilderness. In the center was the *Mishkan*, surrounded by the camp of the Leviim. Surrounding them were the rest of the nation, divided by their tribes. Each tribe had a specific cardinal location, with respect to the center point of the *Mishkan*. Each tribe is also described as having their own flag. These flags served as unique markers to distinguish each tribe from the other. They had different colors and patterns than each other<sup>3</sup>. However, *Chazal* teach us<sup>4</sup> that there was a greater significance to these flags than the Torah describes.

When Hashem "descended" upon Mount Sinai when the Jews were given the Torah, twenty-two thousand<sup>5</sup> Angels descended with Him. Each of these Angels were divided into different groups, each with their own flag<sup>6</sup>. The Jews saw these Angels with their flags, and immediately desired<sup>7</sup> to have their own. They said: "If only we could have flags like these". Hashem responded that if that is what they want, He will fulfill their wish. He immediately told Moshe to tell the people to divide into their tribes, each tribe receiving their own flag.

We see now that the encampment of the Jews in the wilderness, together with their flags, was similar to the encampment of the Angels. But what does it mean that the Angels had flags? What was so special about these flags that the Jews had an intense desire to have their own? Further, why was the revelation at Mount Sinai *the* moment for Hashem to show the Jews the Angels and their flags? They could have been shown these Angels and their flags any other time. These basic questions make this *Midrash* very hard to understand.

What is the general purpose behind Angels? Their basic task is to bring to fruition a revelation of Hashem in this world. What does it mean that the Angels have flags? Each Angel having their own flag shows that every single Angel represents and displays a different aspect of Hashem's Glory. Through all of the Angels together, Hashem's Glory is able to be revealed in this world<sup>8</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> Based on Mima'amakim parshas Bamidbar § 5 by Rav Alexander Mandelbaum, based on the teachings of Rav Moshe Shapira zatzal

<sup>2</sup> Numbers 2:2

<sup>3</sup> Rashi ad. loc.

<sup>4</sup> Bamidbar Rabbah 2:3 (brought in Yalkut Shimoni Shir HaShirim § 986); Midrash Tanchuma Bamidbar § 14; Tanchuma Yashan Bamidbar § 15

<sup>5</sup> Bamidbar Rabbah loc. cit. says two-hundred and twenty-two thousand, but Eitz Yosef and Rashash ad. loc. change it to twenty-two thousand. This fits with Midrash Tanchuma and Tanchuma Yashan loc. cit.

<sup>6</sup> Based on דגול מרבבה (Song of Songs 5:10)

<sup>7</sup> The *Midrash* says לדגלים מתואים, literally lusted or craved for flags

<sup>8</sup> Mima'amkim brings the idea that אין לך כל עשב ועשב מלמטה שאין ממונה עליו מלמעלה ושומר אותו ומכה אותו (Zohar I Hashmatos § 1; Zohar Chadash Bereishis p. 14a says מלמעלה and Bereishis Rabbah 10:6 says בקריע לו מזל לואמר לו גדל (שאין לו מזל בקריע). I think the idea is that since there are immeasurable aspects to Hashem's Glory, there are as well an immeasurable number of Angels representing those aspects, to the point that every blade of grass has its own Angel

It was this lofty concept that the Jews desired. Due to their intense admiration and respect for Hashem, their King, they wanted their very existence to be a revelation of Hashem's majesty and honor. They wanted the merit to represent the Heavenly facets, in all of their forms, in this Earthly realm. Each person according to his tribe; each person according to their flag. Hashem recognized that this desire came from the depth of their hearts, and concurred to fulfill their wish.

This approach explains why this vision of the Angels and their flags was revealed specifically when the Torah was given at Mount Sinai. The whole purpose of that National Revelation was to reveal Hashem as The King of everything. Alternatively, the giving of the Torah was the beginning of a more noticeable and constant revelation of Hashem's Glory in this world. This is because fulfilling the Torah *the way* for Hashem's ways and decrees to come to fruition in this physical realm. They come about through the actions of Man<sup>9</sup>. Therefore, the Jews at that moment merited to witness a vision of the inner depth of what a revelation of Hashem's Glory means. They saw the revelation expressed by the arrangements of the Angels, each accompanied by their own flag.

Good Shabbos

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<sup>9</sup> See Ramban to Exodus 20:2, who brings a *Midrash* which expresses these two explanations: כשתקבלו מלכותי אגזור עליכם גזירות (Mechilta to v. 3; a similar idea appears in Toras Kohanim to Leviticus 18:2)