

Zera Shimshon

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Chapter XXXIV: Bamidbar (Num. 1:1–4:20)

Essay 1. Banners in the Wilderness

מדרש ילקוט "נאנה פירושם" פאותם מלאכי השרת שהם יראים ומשקמים לי, "אימה פנדגלות" פנדגלים שנתתי לה ונדוד רואה ואומר "לא עשה כן לכל-גוי" עכ"ל.

Numbers chapter 2 describes how each Israelite tribe traveled under its own banner, and in Song of Songs 6:4, G-d praises Israel: "You are beautiful, my darling, as Tirzah, comely as Jerusalem; awesome as bannered hosts."

There is a **Midrash Yalkut Shimoni** on Shir haShirim, remez 992:6,¹ that discusses this verse from Song of Songs. "**Comely as Jerusalem [Yerushalayim]**—as comely as the same **ministering angels who revere [ye'rei'im] Me and are dedicated [mu'shalamim] to Me.**" With a play on words, the Midrash relates the first part of the city's name, "Yeru," to the word "ye'rei'im," meaning "fear" or "revere," and relates the second part of the city's name, "shalayim," to the word "mu'shalamim," meaning "dedicated." The Midrash continues its interpretation of the verse. "**Awesome as [an army] with banners**—as the banners that I gave to you and that David saw and said, **He did not do so for any other nation**' (Ps. 147:20)."

קשה דמי הגיד לו שדוד המלך עליו השלום רצה לרמוז על הדגלים? דילמא על השראת שכינה, או על התורה, או על בית המקדש. וגם בפסוק הקודם "מגיד דברו [דבריו] לנעלב חקיו ומשפטיו לישראל" מהו נעלב, ומהו ישראל, ומהו דבריו חקיו ומשפטיו?

This is **difficult, for who said to [the author of the Midrash] that King David, peace be upon him, wanted to hint about the banners**, when he wrote that [G-d] "did not do so for any other nation"? **Perhaps** he was hinting **about the inspiration of the Shechina**, which was given only to Israel, **or about the Torah**, which was given only to Israel, **or about the Temple**, which was given only to Israel? **Also, for the preceding verse, "He issued His commands to Jacob, His statutes and His rules to Israel"** (Ps. 147:19), **what is this** reference to **Jacob** telling us, **and what is this** reference to **Israel** telling us? The patriarch's name was changed from Jacob to Israel, and his descendants can be referred to by either name, but why are both names given in this verse? We know that the name "Israel" represents a higher spiritual elevation than the name "Jacob," but

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¹ Another source is Bamidbar Rabbah 2:5.

why is one name assigned to “His commands” and the other assigned to “His statutes and His rules.” **Also, what is this “His commands . . . His statutes and His rules”?** What is the distinction between these concepts?

ונש לומר דאיתא בקיוט נשם, זה שאמר הכתוב "ודגלו עלי אהבה" פינו שנגלה הקב"ה על הר סיני ירדו עמו עשרים ושנים אלה רבבות מרבבות של מלאכים ששאמר "רכב אלהים רבתי" והיו כלם עשויים דגלים דגלים. אמרו הלואי אנו נעשים דגלים כמוהם, לכך נאמר "הביאני אל בית היי"ן" זה סיני שבו נתנה התורה. אמר להם הקב"ה נתאויתם לדגלים, חייכם שאני עושה שאלתכם ששאמר "ימלא ה' כל-משאלותיך", מייד הודיע הקב"ה אהבתו על ישראל ואמר למשה לך עשה אותם דגלים כמו שנתאוו עכ"ל.

It can be said that it's brought in the Yalkut:

This is what Scripture says, “[He brought me to the banquet room]; His banner of love was over me” (Song of Songs 2:4). When the Holy One, Blessed be He, was revealed on Mount Sinai in order to give the Torah to Israel, twenty-two thousand myriads of chariots of angels descended with Him, as it says, “G-d’s chariots are myriads upon myriads” (Ps. 68:18). They were all arranged by banners, i.e., divided into camps, each camp with its own banner. [Israel] said, “If only we were arranged by banner like [the angels].” Thus, it is said, “He brought me to the banquet room”—this is Sinai, upon which the Torah was given. The Holy One, Blessed be He, said to them, “Do you yearn for banners? Be assured, I will fulfill all of your requests, as it is said, ‘[Arrayed by banners in the name of our G-d;] May the L-rd fulfill your every wish’ (Ps. 20:6).” Immediately, the Holy One, Blessed be He, announced His love for Israel, and he said to Moses, “Go and make those banners, as they have yearned.”

- Bamidbar Rabbah 2:2²

ונה שאמר הכתוב למה "לא עשה כן לכל-גוי" משום "משפטים בל-ידעום" שלא קבלו התורה. ואיזהו הדבר שהרניחו ישראל בקבלת התורה? הני אומר הדגלים שמראים היחוד והשלום פדלקמן בסמוך.

This is what Scripture said about why “He did not do so for any other nation.” It was because, “of such rules they know nothing” (Ps. 147:20), for they did not receive the Torah. What is the thing that Israel has gained by receiving the Torah? You must say the banners, which show the unity, in that each tribe is unified under its banner, and the peace that nevertheless exists between the different tribes and families, as explained further on, in Essay 3 of this chapter.³

² Elements of this quotation are brought in Yalkut Shimoni (Psalms, remez 796 and Shir haShirim, remez 986), but the text more closely follows the version brought in Bamidbar Rabbah 2:2.

³ In Essay 3, Rabbi Nachmani quotes “all the people will go to their place in peace” (Ex. 18:23), and when everyone recognizes his place, peace will exist and there will be no disagreement. The ministering angels, who had peace between them, were arranged by banner, and Israel yearned for banners, so that there would be peace among

ואיתא במדרש שיצקב אבינו עליו השלום צנה לבניו שישאו את ארונו כפי הסדר שהיו ראויים לסייע בדגלים וכו' כדכתוב "איש על־דגלו באתת לבית אבתם" וכו'. וזהו "מגיד דברו [דבריו] ליצקב" שהודיע ליצקב מה שהיה רוצה לצוות לישראל כדי שיצקב גם כן יתלקם כד.

It's brought in the Midrash (Tanchuma, Bamidbar 12) that our father Jacob, peace be upon him, commanded his sons to carry his coffin according to the future custom by which it was proper to travel with banners, as is written, "each with his banner, under the ensigns of their ancestral house" (Num. 2:2). That is, Jacob instructed his sons that after his death, they should carry his coffin out of Egypt and bring it to Hebron, for burial in the Cave of Machpelah. The Midrash states that he instructed them that the 12 tribes should be divided so that there were three tribes adjacent to each side of his coffin. The front (east) side included Judah, Issachar, and Zebulun. The south side included Reuben, Simon, and Gad. The west side included Ephraim, Manasseh, and Benjamin. The north side included Dan, Asher, and Naphtali. After the Torah was given at Sinai, and the banners were given to Israel, they followed the same arrangement of tribes around their encampments in the wilderness, as explained in chapter 2 of Numbers. **This is the meaning of "He issued His commands to Jacob," that [G-d] informed Jacob how He wanted to command Israel,** so that after the Exodus, they should travel and encamp divided by tribe and family, each with its own banner, **so that Jacob would also divide them thus** in his instructions for his burial. In that way, the tribes would already be accustomed to this division and placement.

ואחר כך פשיצאו ממצרים צנה להם "חקיו ומשפטיו" לאפוקי האומות שלא די שלא רצו לקבל החוקים שהם מבלי טעם אלא אף המשפטים שהם דברים שאלמלא לא נכתבו ראויים הם ליכתב כמו שכתב רש"י על פסוק "את־משפטי תעשו ואת־חקתי תשמרו" וכו' גם אלו לא רצו לקבל.

Afterward, when they went out from Egypt, He commanded [Israel] at Mount Sinai "His statutes and His rules" to exclude the nations of the world. For it wasn't enough that they did not want to accept the statutes, which have no reason according to human logic. Rather, even the rules—which are matters that, even if they hadn't have been written in the Torah, it would have been proper for them to be written for observance by human society, such as "don't murder," "give charity," etc., as Rashi wrote on the verse, "My rules alone shall you observe, and faithfully follow My statutes" (Lev. 18:4)—even those logical rules, [the nations] didn't want to accept.

Thus, one possible answer to why "He issued His commands to Jacob, His statutes and His rules to Israel" (Ps. 147:19) referred to both Jacob and Israel is that the reference to Jacob was to the patriarch himself, while the reference to Israel was to the nation named after him.

them. "Bilaam looked up and saw Israel encamped tribe by tribe" (Num. 24:2), i.e., each arranged by banner, and he said, "Who can touch them? For there is no dispute amongst them, for all are arranged by banner into their places; and nothing bad can happen to them." For peace is an instrument that strengthens blessing, and "there is no adversary and no mischance" (I Kings 5:18).

כדאיתא בילקוט "אזכי ה' אלהיך" שפשתגלה הקב"ה על בני עשו ואמר להם מקבלים אתם את התורה? אמרו לו מה כתיב בה? אמר להם "לא תרצח". אמרו לו הוא ירושה שהוריש לנו אבינו "ועל־סרבה תהיה". ועמון ומואב השיבו שעיקרם בא מהניאוף פדכתיב "נתהרין שתי בנות־לוט מאביהן" ולא רצו לקבל "לא תנאף". וישמעאל לא רצה לקבל "לא תגנב" משום הברכה שברכו אביו "והוא יהיה פרא אדם" וכו'. וישראל קבלו הכל חוקים ומשפטים ומשום הכי קראם ישראל לשון חשיבות ולכן צנה להם הדגלים ו-"לא עשה כן" וכו' משום "ומשפטים" וכו'.

It is brought in the Yalkut Shimoni, parsha Yitro, remez 286) on the verse, "I am the L-rd your G-d" (Ex. 20:2), that when the Holy One, Blessed be He, revealed himself to the sons of Esau and He said to them, "Will you accept the Torah," they said to Him, "What is written within it?" He said to them, "Do not murder" (Ex. 20:13). They said to Him, "This attribute of murder is an inheritance that was bequeathed to us by our father, Isaac: 'Yet by your sword you shall live' (Gen. 27:40)." Amon and Moab were also offered the Torah by G-d, and they answered that their origin came from adultery, as it is written, "And the two daughters of Lot became pregnant by their father" (Gen. 19:36), and therefore they didn't want to accept the commandment, "Do not commit adultery" (Ex. 20:13). Ishmael didn't want to accept the commandment, "Do not steal" (Ex. 20:13), because of the blessing by which his Father in Heaven blessed him via the angel speaking to his mother, Hagar: "He shall be a wild donkey of a man, his hand against everyone," (Gen. 16:12), which Rashi interprets to mean that Ishmael will be a highwayman. But Israel accepted everything, the statutes and the rules, and because of this, they are called "Israel" by King David, in language indicating more importance than the name "Jacob" would imply, and therefore [G-d] commanded them the banners, and "He did not do so for any other nation," because "of such rules they know nothing."

Thus, a second possible answer to why "He issued His commands to Jacob, His statutes and His rules to Israel" (Ps. 147:19) referred to both Jacob and Israel is that "His commands" only refers to the personal command to Jacob regarding his burial, while "His statutes and His rules" regards to acceptance of the Torah at Sinai. As the latter is a loftier deed, it is associated with the name "Israel," which as we noted earlier in this essay represents a higher spiritual elevation than the name "Jacob."

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