

Parsha Paths:

BaMidbar: Counting and Camps

Desert, Shepherd, Leader, Speaker

וְרָעוּ כְּבָשִׂים כְּדִבְרָם וְחֲרֻבוֹת מִחַיִּים גְּרָמִים יֹאכְלוּ:
Then shall the lambs feed as in their pasture, and fat ones and strangers shall feed in the ruins. (Isaiah 5:17)

אמר לו הקב"ה טול מקל והך על קדקדם דבר אחד לדור ואין שני דברין לדור

There must be one leader for the generation, and not be two leaders for the generation. (Sanhedrin 8a)

Many Names for the Desert

יִשְׂשׂוּם מִדְבָּר וְצִיָּה וְתִגַּל עֲרָבָה וְתִפְרַח כַּחֲבַצְלֵת:
The arid desert shall be glad,
The wilderness shall rejoice
And shall blossom like a rose. (Isaiah 35:1)

וְלֹא אָמְרוּ אֵינָהּ יְהוָה הִמְעֵלָה אֶתְנוּ מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם הַמְזוּלָיָה אֶתְנוּ בַּמִּדְבָּר בְּאֶרֶץ עֲרָבָה וְשׁוּחָה בְּאֶרֶץ
צִיָּה וְצִלְמוֹת בְּאֶרֶץ לֹא-עָבַר בָּהּ אִישׁ וְלֹא-יָשַׁב אָדָם שָׁם:
They never asked themselves, "Where is GOD,
Who brought us up from the land of Egypt,
Who led us through the wilderness,
A land of deserts and pits,
A land of drought and darkness,
A land nobody had traversed,
Where no human being had dwelt?" (Jeremiah 2:6)

Why Was the Torah Given in the Desert?

"And from the wilderness Mattana and from Mattana Nahaliel, and from Nahaliel Bamot" (Numbers 21:18–19)? Rava said to him that it means: Once a person renders himself like a wilderness, deserted before all, the Torah is given to him as a gift [*mattana*], as it is stated: "And from the wilderness Mattana." (Nedarim 35a)

Why "in the wilderness of Sinai"? From here the Sages taught that the Torah was given with three things: With fire, with water, and with wilderness. From where do

we derive fire? “Mount Sinai was entirely smoking...” (Ex. 19:18). From where do we derive water? As it is said: “The Heavens dripped, the clouds dropped with water,” (Jud. 5:4). From where do we derive wilderness? “Hashem spoke to Moshe in the wilderness of Sinai.” Why was it given with these three things? Just as these are free to all who come into the world, so too words of Torah are free (Bamidbar Rabbah 1)

Torah [was given] from the wilderness, the Tabernacle from the wilderness, Sanhedrin from the wilderness, priesthood from the wilderness, Levites from the wilderness, royalty from the wilderness, as it is stated: “You will be for Me a kingdom of priests” (Exodus 19:6); and all the fine gifts that the Holy One blessed be He gave to Israel were from the wilderness. (Shir HaShirim Rabba 3:6)

And just as this wilderness has no end, so too the Torah has no end” (Yalkut Shimoni 247:273)

Honeymoon?

הָלֹךְ וְקִרְאתָ בְּאָזְנֵי יְרוּשָׁלַיִם לֵאמֹר כֹּה אָמַר יְהוָה זְכַרְתִּי לָךְ חֶסֶד נְעוּרֶיךָ אֲהַבֵת כְּלוּלֹתֶיךָ לְכַתֵּב
אֲחֵרֵי בַמִּדְבָר בְּאֶרֶץ לֹא זְרוּעָה:

Go proclaim to Jerusalem: Thus said GOD:
I accounted to your favor
The devotion of your youth,
Your love as a bride—
How you followed Me in the wilderness,
In a land not sown. (Jeremiah 2:2)

“From the day that I brought the people of Israel out of Egypt to this day I have not dwelt in a house, but have moved about in Tent and Tabernacle.” (Samuel II 7:6)

לָכֵן הִנֵּה אֲנֹכִי מִפְתִּיחַ וְהִלַּכְתִּיךָ הַמִּדְבָר וּדְבַרְתִּי עִלְ-לִבָּהּ:

Assuredly,
I will speak coaxingly to her
And lead her through the wilderness
And speak to her tenderly. (Hoshea 2:16)

Who Are the Tribes?

By Mother:

Leah: Reuven, Simon, Levi, Judah, Issachar, Zevulun

Rachel: Joseph (Efraim and Manassah), Benjamin

Bilhah: Dan, Naftali

Zilpah: Asher, Gad

By Camp:

North: Dan, Asher, Naftali

South: Reuven, Simon, Gad

East: Judah, Issachar, Zevulun

West: Efraim, Manassah, Benjamin

Center: Levi

Flags in the Desert

The Israelites were the first to introduce national flags.

Since Israel was consecrated to the service of God and the Divine Glory was to dwell in the Mishkan which they erected, it was but proper that they should have also their banners. Each tribe had to have colors on its banner corresponding to the colors of the precious stones which were on Aaron's breast-plate.

The banner of Reuben was red, and in the center a painted mandrake. That of Simeon was green, and in its center it had the picture of Shechem. That of Levi had a tricolor, one stripe of white, one of black, and one of red, and in the center it carried the picture of the Urim and Tumim. Judah's banner had the color of the sky, and in the center the picture of a lion.

Issachar's banner was blackish, and had in the center the picture of the sun and the moon. Zebulun had a whitish banner, which carried the picture of a ship in the center. Dan's banner had the color of sapphire, and an image of a serpent in its center. Gad's was a mixture of black and white, and carried the picture of a camp. Naphtali's had the peculiar color of a pale reddish wine, and the picture in its center was that of a hind. Asher's banner bore the color of a precious stone, the ornament of a woman, and the picture of an olive-tree in the center. The color of Joseph's banner was of a deep black, and had the following pictures: Egypt, then an ox representing Ephraim, and a unicorn to represent Manasseh. Benjamin's banner had some of the colors of each tribe, *i.e.*, twelve different colors, and the picture of a wolf in the center. (Bamidbar Rabba 2:7)

Flags: Ancient or Modern?

“And even though it is not appropriate to have a flag in the synagogue and certainly not by the Holy Ark, it is not a prohibition but rather something that is emptiness and foolishness. ..” (Rabbi Moshe Feinstein on putting up American and Israeli flags in a synagogue 1957)

“Nonetheless, we must not lose sight of a law in the Shulchan Aruch to the effect that: “One who has been killed by non-Jews is buried in his clothes, so that the blood may be seen and avenged, as it is written: “I will hold (the heathen) innocent, but not in regard to the blood which they have shed” (Joel 4:21). In other words, the clothes of the Jew acquires a certain sanctity when spattered with the blood of a martyr. How much more is this so of the blue and white flag, which has been immersed in the blood of thousands of young Jews who fell in the War of Independence defending the country and the population? It has a spark of sanctity that flows from devotion and self-sacrifice. We are enjoined to honor the flag and treat it with respect.” (‘The Rav Speaks,’ 5743, p. 139) Rabbi Y.D. Soloveitchik

Biblical Directions

וְהַחֲנִיטִים קִדְמָה מִזְרָחָה דָּגְלֵי מַחֲנֵה יְהוּדָה לְצַבָּאתֶם וְנָשִׂיא לְבָנֵי יְהוּדָה נְחֻשׁוֹן בֵּן־עַמִּינַדָּב:
דָּגְלֵי מַחֲנֵה רְאוּבֵן תִּימְנָה לְצַבָּאתֶם וְנָשִׂיא לְבָנֵי רְאוּבֵן אֶלִיָּצוּר בֵּן־שִׁדְיָאוּר:
דָּגְלֵי מַחֲנֵה אֶפְרַיִם לְצַבָּאתֶם יִמָּה וְנָשִׂיא לְבָנֵי אֶפְרַיִם אֶלִישָׁמַע בֵּן־עַמִּיהוּד:
דָּגְלֵי מַחֲנֵה דָן צַפְנָה לְצַבָּאתֶם וְנָשִׂיא לְבָנֵי דָן אַחִיעֶזֶר בֵּן־עַמִּישַׁדַּי:

The Mysterious Tachash

וַנִּתְּנוּ אֹתָהּ וְאֶת־כָּל־כְּלֵיהָ אֶל־מִכְסָּה עוֹר תַּחַשׁ וְנִתְּנוּ עַל־הַמּוֹט:

They shall put it and all its furnishings into a covering of tachash skin, which they shall then place on a carrying frame.(Bamidbar 4:10)

Targum Onkelos: tachash: sasgonna (proud of its colors)

Rabbi Ela said that Rabbi Shimon ben Lakish said that Rabbi Meir used to say: The *tahash* that existed in the days of Moses was a creature unto itself, and the Sages did not determine whether it was a type of undomesticated animal or a type of domesticated animal. And it had a single horn on its forehead, and this *tahash* happened to come to Moses for the moment (Shabbat 28b)

This is the offering ... and rams' skins dyed red, and sealskins (Exod. 25:3). R. Judah and R. Nehemiah discussed this verse. R. Judah said: It was a large pure animal, with a single horn in its forehead and a skin of six different colors that roamed the desert. (Midrash Tanhuma, Terumah 6)