



Toronto Torah

Yeshiva University Torah MiTzion Beit Midrash Zichron Dov

Parshat Bamidbar

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in honour of our good friend, Gerard Klein, to celebrate his special birthday

Waving the Flag

Yaron Perez

This week we begin to read the book of Bamidbar, recording the Jews' travels through the wilderness. As is expected at the start of a journey, the Torah calls the roll of Bnei Yisrael, and describes the order and structure of their camp, as technical details necessary for organizing the nation. Bamidbar 2:2 describes, "Each by his flag, with signs for their families, Bnei Yisrael camped." But what is the flag described in this sentence?

Rashi addresses this question, explaining, "A sign, a coloured cloth hung on each flag. Each had a different colour; the colour for each was like the colour of its stone, affixed to the *choshen*. Therefore, each one would recognize his flag." Thus, we learn, for the first time, that there are flags for each tribe. But when did this begin? What was the source for the idea of having flags?

A midrash (Bamidbar Rabbah 2) reveals the source of the flags: "When G-d was revealed at Mount Sinai, 220,000 *malachim* descended with Him... And all of them were aligned by flags... When Israel saw that they were aligned by flags, they began to desire flags...G-d said to them, 'You desire to have flags? By your lives, I will fulfill your desire!... Immediately, G-d informed Israel and told Moshe, 'Go arrange them by flags, as they desire.'" But what was the purpose?

Rabbi Ephraim Luntschitz (*Kli Yakar*) explains, "Israel's main desire was to show all of the nations that the Name of G-d is upon them, and [the nations] would be in awe of them, and this

would lead [Israel] to raise the flag of exaltation and victory in all of the four directions. By [Israel] surrounding in all four directions, with the Shechinah and the Ark in the middle, the mound toward which all turn, all of the nations would see that they go in the Name of G-d... And this is the sign of the flag, a sign of victory in battle. And this flag would be in the Name of G-d, for they would conquer the land not by their sword but by the Name of G-d..."

The flag conveys a message, in the name of the nation, to the world. But in order to wave the flag in the name of the nation, we must be unified around the banner – around the Shechinah, around the Tent of Meeting. Only after the presentation of the Torah could Bnei Yisrael wave the flag throughout the world – not only because they had received the Torah but because this was the first time they were unified around the banner, around the recognition that the Name of G-d was called upon them.

Three weeks ago, we celebrated the incredible miracle of the establishment of the State, but then the joy was only partial. The heart and the nation were split when the State was established; the site of the Beit haMikdash was in foreign hands, large portions of the land were under foreign control, the security and financial situations were difficult, and internal battles split the nation. We could not raise our heads and wave our flag.

Nineteen years later – fifty years ago – we merited another step on the path to Redemption; in six days we saw open

miracles, personal and national. The State of Israel grew fourfold, and there was a clear understanding that this was from G-d. We returned to the site of the Temple, and each individual was moved by the words of Paratrooper Commander Motta Gur, "the Temple Mount is in our hands." The nation was unified behind the banner, and we could now wave the flag for all of the nations as a sign that G-d was with us.

Anyone who has seen Jerusalem on the annual day of its celebration has certainly been moved by the traditional parade of flags to the Old City. Thousands of marchers rejoice and dance, heads held high and the banner waving in every direction: We are here, and G-d is with us!

The joy of the new redemption of Jerusalem calls to mind the redemption from Egypt, as described by Ramban (Shemot 14:5), "This is the meaning of 'And Bnei Yisrael departed with a raised arm.' They made a flag and a banner to wave, going out with joy and song, with drum and lyre, like those redeemed from slavery to freedom, not like slaves destined to return to their slavery." May we merit the complete Redemption soon!

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Jewish History in Conflict
Mitchell First
Aronson Press (1997)

Who is the author?

Mitchell First, a lawyer living in New Jersey, received an M.A. in Jewish History from Yeshiva University's Bernard Revel Graduate School in 1995. Aside from *Jewish History in Conflict*, he has also published *Esther Unmasked: Solving Eleven Mysteries of the Jewish Holidays and Liturgy* (Kodesh Press 2015), and various articles.

What is this "conflict"?

The traditional timeline of Jewish history, recorded in the midrashic *Seder Olam Rabbah* and relied upon in the Talmud (see Bava Batra 3a-b and Arachin 12a-b), dates the construction of the first Beit haMikdash to 831 BCE, its destruction to 421 BCE, the construction of the second Beit haMikdash to 351 BCE and its destruction in approximately 68 CE. However, this chronology runs afoul of significant literary records and archaeological evidence regarding the Persian Empire between the rise of Cyrus the Great and the rise of the

Greek Empire. Based on the calculations of secular historians, the first Beit haMikdash was built in approximately 965 BCE, the Persians conquered Babylon under Cyrus in 539 BCE, construction of the second Beit haMikdash began in 521 BCE – and we are currently living in the 60th century since Creation.

The gap between the traditional and secular chronologies is approximately 160 years. This discrepancy does not affect daily Jewish practice, but it does affect talmudic calculations of the shemita cycles as well as interpretation of the book of Daniel, and it challenges the traditional dating of the world as 5777 years old. It also raises a fundamental religious question: How does a believing Jew respond to widely accepted scholarship which contradicts rabbinic teachings?

What does this book add?

The problem of conflicting histories is hardly new; Rabbi Saadia Gaon addressed it in the 10th century. For the most part, Jewish tradition has upheld the view of *Seder Olam*, although recent centuries have seen an openness to accepting the evidence

of secular archaeology. Most notably, rabbis from the 16th century Rabbi Azariah de Rossi (Meor Einayim) to the 20th century Rabbi Shimon Schwab have suggested ways to resolve the evidence and the histories. Mr. First's central contribution is to collect, analyze and annotate a well-footnoted list of dozens of rabbinic positions, from that of Rabbi Saadia Gaon until the present day.

A difficult read

One of the main reasons why most Jews are unaware of the missing years is that a true understanding of the problem requires knowledge of the books of Daniel and Ezra, as well as patient study of the identities of Persian kings. Mr. First makes a good attempt to lay out the two competing systems in Appendices A and B, but the issues remain complicated, and this book will only be truly useful to the reader who dedicates serious time and attention to these prerequisite areas of study.

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Israel's Chief Rabbis: Rabbi Shlomo Amar

Rabbi Jonathan Ziring

Rabbi Shlomo Amar
b. 1948

Chief Rabbi of Tel Aviv 2002-2003
Sephardic Chief Rabbi of Jerusalem 2003-2013

Rabbi Shlomo Amar was born in Casablanca, Morocco, and he ascended to Israel in 1962. He studied in several yeshivot both in Morocco and in Israel. He learned from Rabbi Nissim Toledano and Rabbi Yaakov Nissan Rosenthal, considering the latter to be his main teacher. He was also close to Rabbi Ovadia Yosef and has familial ties to him as well.

Rabbi Amar served as a Rosh Yeshiva in his early twenties, headed the kashrut supervision in Nahariya, was the Rabbi of Moshav Megadim, and held several other rabbinic positions. He also acted as a judge in a series of cities, eventually becoming Chief Justice on the rabbinical court in Petach Tikva. He served in the IDF in a unit devoted to identifying bodies. He also taught courses for both soldiers and members of ZAKA on the halachic issues involved with treating the deceased properly, drawing on both erudition and practical experience; ZAKA is devoted to caring for the survivors and victims of terror attacks. In 2002 he was appointed Chief Rabbi of Tel Aviv (the first one to serve alone, without an Ashkenazi counterpart), and a year later was appointed Sephardic Chief Rabbi of Israel. In May 2017 he was awarded an honorary doctorate by Bar Ilan University.

His Legacy

Rabbi Amar has devoted much effort to improving Kashrut supervision, and, as mentioned above, to improving education about proper treatment of the dead. He was also involved in dealing with the halachic and political issues

related to the Ethiopian Jews, helping establish the conditions to bring them to the State of Israel.

His halachic positions are mostly known through his responsa, *Shema Shlomo* (8 volumes). He has two other volumes of responsa, *Kerem Shlomo*, devoted just to agricultural laws, and *Be'erah shel Miryam* on the laws of Kashrut. He has also published a book of articles on marriage-related issues. He has written extensively about agricultural laws in Israel, addressing matters including defining the five grains, and deciding the proper blessing on quinoa. He has also dealt with modern agricultural questions, ruling that it is permitted to create genetically modified organisms (GMOs) without violating the prohibition against kilayim (forbidden mixtures of species).

As Chief Rabbi of Israel, Rabbi Amar ruled to recognize brain death as halachic death, and he also ruled that a representative of the Rabbanut did not have to be present to ascertain that the patient had reached that state. He weighed in on many of the potential *agunah* issues that arose after the attack on the Twin Towers, eventually permitting several women to remarry though it was difficult to identify their husbands. His responsa cover the gamut of halachic issues, including inheritance issues, issues relating to artificial insemination, questions of prohibited marriages, and kashrut.

Aside from his halachic works, Rabbi Amar has written works on Parshah, Mesilat Yesharim, and the Haggadah, as well as published a book of liturgical poetry (*piyutim*).

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Biography

Rabbi Avraham Mordechai Alter

Rabbi Baruch Weintraub

Rabbi Avraham Mordechai Alter was the firstborn son to his father, the famous "S'fat Emet" – Rabbi Yehudah Leib Alter of Ger (in Polish: Góra Kalwaria). A natural heir to what was already one of the biggest Chasidic courts in Poland, he received a thorough Chasidic education in the spirit of Rabbi Menachem Mendel of Kotzk, the spiritual father of Gerrer Chasidut.

In 1905, after the sudden passing of his father, Rabbi Avraham Mordechai was crowned as the fourth Gerrer Rebbe; he also became known as the *Imrei Emet*, the title of his published writings. To the surprise of his Hasidim, in the first years he refused to take money from them, and sustained himself from trade and business.

Rabbi Avraham Mordechai's instructions – some of which are kept by Gerrer Chasidim to this day – emphasized adherence to halachah and the importance of Talmud Torah. He changed the time of Shacharit to make it compatible with halachic requirements, differing from his predecessors, who delayed Shacharit in order to prepare themselves spiritually. He instituted a pause in the Shabbat Shacharit prayer to allow time for Torah study, and he compelled his Chasidim to learn every day between Mincha and Maariv. He also took special interest in the learning of young children, emphasizing once that "Ger has tens of thousands of Chasidim who eat on Yom Kippur and do not wear Tefillin."

Gerrer Chasidut grew rapidly under his guidance, reaching more than 10,000 Chasidim between the world wars. Rabbi Alter became an international Jewish leader and one of the main founders of Agudat Yisrael. He showed an ambiguous attitude towards the fast-growing Zionist enterprise.

After visiting Eretz Yisrael a few times, in 1935 he made *aliyah*. In 1936 he visited his Chasidim in Poland and stayed there, first waiting for an Arab revolt to end, then stranded there by World War II. In 1940 he was rescued with his close family from the Warsaw Ghetto and returned to Eretz Yisrael.

He passed away on Shavuot, 1948, during the War of Independence. He was eulogized by his son and successor, Rabbi Yisrael Alter, who said, "No one in recent generations gave faith to so many."

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Torah and Translation

A Complete Mitzvah

R' Avraham Mordechai Alter, Imrei Emet 3, Shavuot

Translated by Rabbi Baruch Weintraub

קורין רות בשבועות. איתא במדרש: "ויצט לה קלי" א"ר יצחק בר מריון, בא הכתוב ללמדך שאם אדם עושה מצוה יעשנה בלבב שלם וכו' ואלו היה יודע בועז שהקב"ה מכתוב עליו 'ויצט וכו' עגלות מפותמות היה מאכילה וכו', לשעבר היה אדם עושה מצוה והנביא כותבה ועכשיו וכו' אליהו כותבה ומלך המשיח והקב"ה חותם על ידיהם."

זקנינו ז' לומר שאם היה יודע שנעשה מזה תורה, היה זה מסייע שיוכל לגמור בשלימות. כי צריכין לראות שמכל מצוה תעשה תורה, וזהו שכתוב "קדשנו במצותיך ותן חלקנו בתורתך", שהמצוה תהיה תורה... וזה נקרא "עשיה בלב שלם" שמהמצוה נעשה תורה.

"הקב"ה חותם על ידיהן," כי אין ביכולת האדם לעשות המצוה כראוי כי היא למעלה מהשגתו, אלא צריך הוא להשתדל לעשותה כפי כחו ואז הקב"ה משלים השאר, וזהו "הקב"ה חותם על ידיהן."

וכן הוא מה דכתיב "ליראי ד' ולחושבי שמו", ואיתא בגמרא: "חישב אדם לעשות מצוה ונאנס ולא עשה מעלה עליו הכתוב כאילו עשה". "ונאנס" היינו שאי אפשר לו לגמור המצוה בשלימות כדבעי למיעבד, אז הקב"ה משלים וזהו "מעלה עליו הכתוב וכו'". ולעתיד יתגלה זה... כשם שהמתגניר היום אינו יודע כלום בתורה, כך עיניו של אדם פתוחות ואינו יודע בין ימינו לשמאלו כלום בתורה... עד שהקב"ה מאיר עיניהם... עיקר הכח הוא מה שהקב"ה מסייע.

We read Ruth on Shavuot. A midrash says: "And [Boaz] gave [Ruth] parched grain." Said Rabbi Yitzchak Bar Marion: The verse comes to teach you that when a person performs a mitzvah he should perform it with his whole heart... For if Boaz had known that G-d would write about him, 'And he gave her parched grain', he would have fed her fat calves... In the past a person would perform a mitzvah and the prophet would record it [in Torah], and now Eliyahu writes, with the King Messiah, and G-d signs 'upon their hands.'"

My grandfather explained that if Boaz had known his act would become Torah [by being recorded by G-d], this would have led him to complete it perfectly. For we must see that every mitzvah can be [recorded as] Torah. This is what is written, "Sanctify us with Your commandments and give us a portion in Your Torah." It is a request that the mitzvah may become Torah... And this is called "performing with a complete heart," when the mitzvah becomes Torah.

[And it says] "G-d signs upon their hands," because a human being cannot perform a mitzvah fully, for it is beyond his reach. Rather, he should attempt to perform it according to his abilities, and then G-d will complete the rest, and that is "G-d signs upon their hands."

That is also the meaning of the verse (Malachi 3:16), "Those who fear G-d and give importance to [lit. think of] His Name," and the Talmud (Berachot 6a) comments, "If a person thought to perform a mitzvah and he was forced not to do it, the verse refers to him as if he had indeed performed it." "He was forced" means that he was not able to complete the mitzvah perfectly as would be appropriate. Then G-d completes it, and this is the meaning of "the verse refers to him as if, etc." This will be revealed in the future... In the same way that one who converts today knows nothing of the Torah, so a person's eyes are open but he sees nothing, unable to tell left from right at all in Torah, until G-d illuminates their eyes... For the primary strength comes from Divine assistance.

As we have seen previously (see Mitzvot 81 and 233-235, for example), the Torah establishes a bedrock need for a justice system which can be trusted to treat everyone fairly. Thus, among other relevant verses, Shemot 23:6 warns, “Do not slant the judgment of a pauper in his quarrel,” and Vayikra 19:15 commands, “Do not corrupt justice; do not favour the indigent; and do not look positively upon the great. You shall judge your friend fairly.”

To the collection of justice-reinforcing verses Devarim 24:17 adds, “Do not slant the judgment of a stranger or an

orphan.” Rambam (Sefer haMitzvot, Shoresh 9) explains that the Torah presents this as a unique instruction, separate from the general commandments of honest justice. Rambam also writes (Sefer haMitzvot, Lo Taaseh 280) that one who warps the judgment of a stranger is then guilty of two separate violations of the Torah. Therefore, Sefer haChinuch records this as the Torah’s 590th mitzvah, separate from other mitzvot regarding justice.

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Weekly Highlights: May 27 – June 2 / 2 Sivan – 8 Sivan

Time	Speaker	Topic	Location	Special Notes
שבת May 26-27 Pre-Shavuot Shabbaton at Clanton Park!				
After Hashkamah	Adam Friedmann	Agricultural or Spiritual?	Clanton Park	
Derashah	R’ Jonathan Ziring	From Bamidbar to Shavuot	Clanton Park	
6:00 PM	R’ Jonathan Ziring	Rising of Bread & the Jews	Clanton Park	<i>For women</i>
Seudah Shlishit	Adam Friedmann	Jews and Rash Decisions	Clanton Park	
After minchah	R’ Mordechai Torczyner	Gemara: Bowing to Animals	BAYT	<i>Simcha Suite</i>
Sun. May 28				
8:45 AM	R’ Jonathan Ziring	Responsa	BAYT	<i>Hebrew</i>
9:15 AM	R’ Shalom Krell	Book of Shemuel II	Associated North	<i>Room 206; Hebrew</i>
Mon. May 29				
7:00 PM	Adam Friedmann	The Lonely Man of Faith	Terraces of Baycrest	<i>New Topic!</i>
8:30 PM	R’ Jonathan Ziring	Modern Ribbit, #1 of 3 Ethics of the Heter Iska	Shomrai Shabbos	<i>For men</i>
SHAVUOT! Tuesday May 30—Thursday June 1				
<p>Tuesday evening May 30 Before Maariv, Rabbi Jonathan Ziring It is not enough to be right, BAYT</p> <p>11:45 PM, Mrs. Ora Ziring, for university women Star(bucks) K: What’s Kosher at Starbucks?, 49 Tangreen</p> <p>Wednesday May 31 12:00 AM, Rabbi Mordechai Torczyner Torat Agnon: L’Veit Abba: More than Egyptians, TCS</p> <p>1:00 AM, Rabbi Mordechai Torczyner Torat Agnon: HaNidach: Chasidim vs. Mitnagdim, BAYT</p> <p>1:00 AM, Rabbi Jonathan Ziring What Changed at Har Sinai?, TCS</p> <p>1:10 AM, Adam Friedmann Dairy for Lunch?!, Clanton Park</p> <p>1:30 AM, Yaron Perez Customs of Shavuot, Shaarei Shomayim, English</p> <p>2:00 AM, Rabbi Jonathan Ziring Torah Taught from the Heart, Not the Book, BAYT</p> <p>2:10 AM, Rabbi Mordechai Torczyner Torat Agnon: HaTizmoret: The Orchestra, Zichron Yisroel</p>			<p>2:30 AM, Yaron Perez The Baal Shem Tov & Shavuot, Shaarei Shomayim, Hebrew</p> <p>3:00 AM, Rabbi Mordechai Torczyner Torat Agnon: Mei’Oyev l’Ohev, Bnei Akiva @Zichron Yisroel</p> <p>4:00 AM, Adam Friedmann Dairy for Lunch?!, Shaarei Tefillah</p> <p>4:00 AM, Rabbi Mordechai Torczyner Torat Agnon: BaDerech: On the Road Again, Ayin l’Tzion</p> <p>Evening program at BAYT 6:40 PM Rabbi Jonathan Ziring, TBD 7:20 PM R’ Mordechai Torczyner, Ivtzan: Prequel to Ruth</p> <p>Before minchah, Rabbi Jonathan Ziring Daf Yomi, BAYT</p> <p>Thursday June 1 After Hashkamah, Rabbi Jonathan Ziring Minchat Chinuch, BAYT</p> <p>7:45 PM, Rabbi Mordechai Torczyner Can a non-Israeli be Jewish?, Bnai Torah</p> <p>Before minchah, Rabbi Jonathan Ziring Daf Yomi. BAYT</p>	
Fri. June 2				
10:30 AM	R’ Mordechai Torczyner	Ribbit	Yeshivat Or Chaim	<i>Advanced</i>