

PARSHAT BAMIDBAR
2 SIVAN 5781/13 MAY 2021



Tribal Tents

by Yoram Raanan

The people were seized by a desire to be like the angels, arrayed under banners.

DESIRE WITHIN THE WILDERNESS

1. When God revealed Godself on Mount Sinai, twenty-two thousand angels descended with God and they were all arrayed under separate flags, as it is said, “Marked out by flags from among myriads” (Song of Songs 5:10). When Israel saw them arrayed under separate flags, they began to long for flags. God said to them, “How you long to be ranged under flags! As you live, I shall fulfill your desire!” God immediately informed Israel by telling Moses, “Go arrange them under flags as they have desired.” (Bamidbar Rabbah 2:2)
2. “Each with its standard, under the banners of their ancestral house....” There is an allusion to this in “Who is this that looks forth as the dawn, fair as the moon, clear as the sun, terrible as an army with banners...?” (Song of Songs 6:10) Holy and grand was Israel beneath their banners. All the nations looked at them with rapt attention and wonder....These nations said to them, “Return, return, O Shulamite....” (Song of Songs 7:1), “cling to us, come to us, and we will make you governors, generals, commanders, lieutenants, commanders-in-chief. Return, and we will look upon you!” “Look upon you” means “appoint you to power.” (Bamidbar Rabbah 2:3)
3. “And Adonai spoke to Moses in the wilderness of Sinai” (Numbers 1:1). Anyone who does not throw themselves open to all like a wilderness cannot acquire wisdom and Torah. (Bamidbar Rabbah 1:7)

4. *Will* transformation. Oh be inspired for the flame
in which a Thing disappears and bursts into something else;
the spirit of re-creation which masters this earthly form
loves most the pivoting point where you are no longer yourself.

...

One who pours oneself out like a stream is acknowledged at last by Knowledge;
and she leads him enchanted through the harmonious country
that finishes often with starting, and with ending begins.
(Rilke, *Sonnets to Orpheus*)

5. *Ein midbar ela dibbur* (“Wilderness is nothing but utterance”) [Shemot Rabbah 2:5]