

# THE MYSTICAL SIGNIFICANCE OF THE CAMP

## Ramban on Parashat Bemidbar

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### Numbers 2

2 'The children of Israel shall pitch by their fathers' houses; every man with his own standard, according to the ensigns; a good way off shall they pitch round about the tent of meeting.

### ספר במדבר פרק ב'

(ב) אִישׁ עַל דָּגְלוֹ בְּאֹתוֹת לְבֵית  
אָבֹתָם יַחְנוּ בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל מִמִּגְד סָבִיב  
לְאֹהֶל מוֹעֵד יַחְנוּ:

### Ramban on Numbers 2:2

### רמב"ן במדבר פרק ב' פסוק ב'

2. EVERY MAN SHALL ENCAMP BY HIS OWN STANDARD. Each standard was to have a colored cloth hanging on it, the color of one being unlike the color of another. The color of each standard corresponded to that of the stone fixed in the breastplate, and by this method everyone would recognize his standard. This is Rashi's language.

(ב) אִישׁ עַל דָּגְלוֹ בְּאֹתוֹת. כָּל דָּגֵל יִהְיֶה  
לוֹ מִפֶּה צְבוּעָה תְלוּיָהּ בּוֹ,  
צְבוּעוֹ שֶׁל זֶה לֹא כְצְבוּעוֹ שֶׁל זֶה, צְבֹעַ כָּל  
אֶחָד כְּעֵין אָבְנוֹ הַקְּבוּעָה בַּחֶשֶׁן, וּמִתּוֹךְ  
כֵּן כָּל אֶחָד מִכִּיר אֶת דָּגְלוֹ, לְשׁוֹן רִשׁוֹ:

But Rabbi Abraham commented: There were signs on each of the [four main] standards. Thus the ancient Sages said that on Reuben's standard there was a figure of a man decorated with mandrakes, and on Judah's standard there was the form of a lion, to which Jacob had compared him, and on Ephraim's standard was the figure of an ox, based upon *the firstborn of his ox*, and on Dan's standard was the figure of an eagle. Thus [the four signs on the four main standards] were similar to the four figures that the prophet Ezekiel saw [in the Divine Chariot].

וְכַתֵּב ר"א סִימָנִים הָיוּ בְּכָל דָּגֵל,  
וְקִדְמוֹנָנוּ אָמְרוּ שֶׁהָיָה בְּדָגֵל רְאוּבֵן  
צוּרַת אָדָם וּמְצִירִים עָלָיו דּוּדָאִים, וּבְדָגֵל  
יְהוּדָה צוּרַת אַרְיֵה כִּי בּוֹ הִמְשִׁילוֹ יַעֲקֹב  
(כְּרֹאשִׁית מַט ט), וּבְדָגֵל אֶפְרַיִם צוּרַת שׁוֹר  
מִטְעָם בְּכוֹר שׁוֹרוֹ (דְּבָרִים ל ג יז), וּבְדָגֵל דָּן  
צוּרַת נֶשֶׁר, עַד שֶׁיָּדְמוּ לְכְרוּבִים שֶׁרָאָה  
יְחִזְקֵאל הַנְּבִיא:

The Tent of Meeting was in the exact center, with the camps of the Levites surrounding it in the midst of the camps [of the other tribes], as is mentioned in Sefer Yetzirah: "And the Holy Temple is placed exactly in the middle."

Now the directions [in which the standards were to be set up] begin with the east, like the movement of the sun [in its daily course], and afterwards the south, and then the west and finally the north. They put the [main] standard of Judah in the east because he was the first to start journeying as he was the prince, just as G-d commanded, Judah shall go up first, and Reuben was [set next to him] in the south to honor him as the firstborn. Thus these two neighboring standards consisted of [the children of] Leah [i.e., Judah, Issachar, Zebulun, Reuben Shimon] together with the firstborn of her maidservant who was born upon her [Leah's] knees [i.e., Gad the son of Zilpah.]. And there was one [main] standard for the children of Rachel [Ephraim, Menasheh, and Benjamin] in the west, and the standard of the [other] children of the maidservants [Dan, Asher, and Naphtali] was last, in the north.

I have furthermore seen in the Midrash [the following text]: "And just as the Holy One, blessed be He, created four directions in the universe, so He surrounded His Throne with four 'living creatures,' 'I and high above them all is the Throne of Glory. The Holy One, blessed be He, told Moses to arrange the standards in a manner corresponding to these directions. Thus He said to him: In the east, whence comes light to the world, shall Judah the sovereign pitch his camp, and next to him shall be the tribe of Issachar, who studies the Torah, and next to him the tribe of Zebulun, who is wealthy, just as it is written, *Zebulun shall dwell at the shore of the sea*, and it is also said [of Zebulun], *for they shall suck the abundance of the sea*. They were to be the first to journey, just as it is said, *And their king is passed on before them, and the Eternal at the head of them*.

וְהָיָה אֹהֶל מוֹעֵד בְּתוֹךְ הָאֳמָצֵעַ וּמַחֲנֵה  
הַלְוִיִּם סְבִיבָיו בְּתוֹךְ הַמַּחֲנֹת, כְּעִנְיָן  
שֶׁהִזְכֹּר בְּסֵפֶר יִצְרָח, וְהֵיכַל קֹדֶשׁ מְכֻנָּה  
בְּאֳמָצֵעַ:

וְהָיָה הַפְּאוֹת תְּחִלָּתָן מִן הַמִּזְרָח כְּמַהְלָךְ  
הַשֶּׁמֶשׁ, וְאַחֲרָיו הַדְּרוֹם וְאַחֲרָיו  
הַמַּעֲרָב וְאַחֲרָיו הַצָּפוֹן. וְשֵׁמוֹ דָּגֵל יְהוּדָה  
בְּמִזְרָח, כִּי הוּא נוֹסֵעַ בְּרֵאשׁוֹנָה שֶׁהוּא  
הַנְּגִיד, כְּמוֹ שֶׁצִּוָּה ה' (שׁוֹפְטִים א ב וּשְׁם כ  
יח) יְהוּדָה יַעֲלֶה בְּתַחֲלָה, וְרֵאוּבֵן בְּדְרוֹם  
לְכַבּוֹד הַבְּכוּרָה. וְהָיָה שְׁנֵי הַדָּגֻלִּים  
הַסְּמוּכִים הָיוּ לְלֵאָה עִם בְּכוֹר שֶׁפָּתְחָה  
הַנוֹלָד עַל בְּרַפְיָהּ, וְדָגֵל אֶחָד לְבְנֵי רַחֵל  
בְּמַעֲרָב, וְדָגֵל בְּנֵי הַשְּׁפָחוֹת בְּצָפוֹן,  
אַחֲרוֹנִים:

וְעוֹד רְאִיתִי בְּמִדְרָשׁ (במדב"ר ב ט), וְכִשְׁם  
שֶׁבְרָא הַקְּדוֹשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא אֲרַבַּע  
רוּחוֹת בְּעוֹלָם כִּף סִבָּב לְכִסְאוֹ אֲרַבַּע  
חַיּוֹת, וְלִמְעַלָּה מִכֻּלָּם כִּסֵּא הַכְּבוֹד, וְכַנְגְדוֹן  
סִדֵּר הַקְּדוֹשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא הַדָּגֻלִּים לְמִשְׁהָ.  
אָמַר לוֹ מִזְרָח שֶׁמִּמֶּנּוּ יוֹצֵא אוֹר לְעוֹלָם  
יְהֵא כְּנִגְדוֹ יְהוּדָה שֶׁהוּא בְּעַל מְלוּכָה,  
וְעָלָיו שֶׁבֵט יִשְׁשַׁכֵּר שֶׁהוּא בְּעַל תּוֹרָה,  
וְעָלָיו מִטָּה זְבוּלָן שֶׁהוּא בְּעַל עֲשִׂירוֹת,  
כְּמָה דְכִתְיִב (בראשית מט יג) זְבוּלָן לְחוּף  
יָמִים יִשְׁכֵן, כְּמוֹ שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר (דברים לג יט) כִּי  
שָׁפַע יָמִים יִנְקוּ, יִסְעוּ בְּרֵאשׁוֹנָה, כְּמוֹ  
שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר (מיכה ב יג) וַיַּעֲבֹר מִלְּכֶם לְפָנֵיהֶם  
וְה' בְּרֵאשֵׁם:

From the south come the dews and the rains [which bring] blessing for the world, therefore shall Reuben pitch on that side, for he is the master of repentance, which is a good quality, and the mercies of the Holy One, blessed be He, come to the world when people repent. Next to Reuben is Gad, who has the quality of heroism. Thus there were [in the south] Reuben with repentance, Gad with heroism, and in between them Shimon in order to atone. *And they shall set forth second*, because repentance is second to Torah.

In the west are the storehouses of snow, and the storehouses of hail, cold, and heat, and corresponding to them were [the tribes of] Ephraim, Menasheh and Benjamin, and the Divine Presence is always in the west within the border of Benjamin, as it is said, *Of Benjamin he [Moses] said: The beloved of the Eternal shall dwell in safety by Him. And they shall set forth third*, for heroism is fitting to Torah and repentance, in order that a person may grow strong in Torah and overcome his [bad] inclinations.

From the north comes darkness to the world, and corresponding to it was the tribe of Dan. For what reason? It is because the tribe of Dan darkened the world through the idols which Jeroboam made, as it is said, *and the one idol he put in Dan*. Next to him was the tribe of Asher, to illuminate the darkness, as it is said [of Asher], *and he shall dip his foot in oil*, and next to him was the tribe of Naphtali who is full of blessings. *They shall set forth hindmost*, for whoever worships idols *goes backward and not forward*.

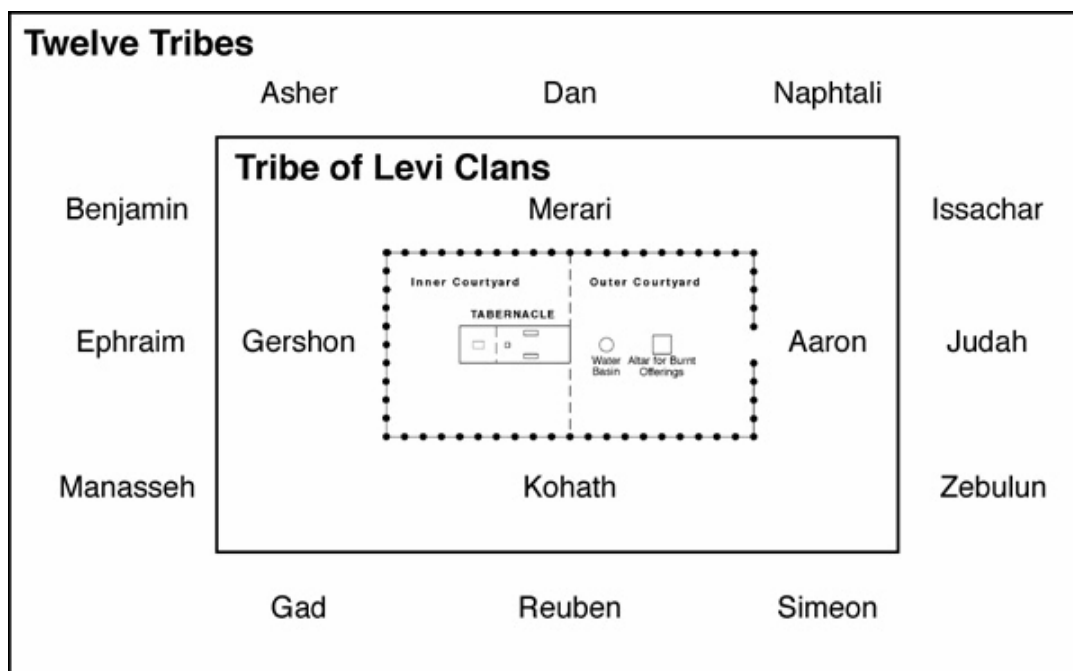
There the Rabbis also interpret [the camp as] corresponding to the four groups of angels. The Midrash also explains there that it was all in wisdom, [showing] honor and greatness to Israel, and that therefore Scripture mentions everything in detail.

דְרוֹם, טְלָלִי בְרָכָה וְגַשְׁמֵי בְרָכָה יוֹצְאִים  
מִמֶּנּוּ לְעוֹלָם יֵהָא כְּנִגְדּוֹ רְאוּבֵן  
שֶׁהוּא בְּעַל תְּשׁוּבָה, וְהַתְּשׁוּבָה מְדָה טוֹבָה  
וְרַחֲמָיו שֶׁל הַקְּדוֹשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא בְּאֵין  
לְעוֹלָם בְּשָׂעָה שְׁעוֹשִׁין תְּשׁוּבָה, וְעַלְיוֹ גָּד  
שֶׁהוּא בְּעַל גְּבוּרָה, רְאוּבֵן בְּתְשׁוּבָה וְגָד  
בְּגְבוּרָה וְשִׁמְעוֹן בְּאִמְצָע לְכַפֵּר עָלָיו,  
וּשְׁנַיִם יִסְעוּ, שֶׁהַתְּשׁוּבָה הִיא שְׁנֵי  
לְתוֹרָה:

מִמַּעַרְב, אוֹצְרוֹת שֶׁלֵּג וְאוֹצְרוֹת בָּרָד וְקוֹר  
וְחֶם, וְכִנְגְדֵן אֶפְרַיִם וּמְנַשֶּׁה  
וּבְנֵימֵן, וְשִׁכְנָה לְעוֹלָם בְּמַעַרְב בְּגְבוּל  
בְּנֵימֵן, שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר (דְּבָרִים ל"ג י"ב) לְבְנֵימֵן אָמַר  
יְדִיד ה' יִשְׁכֵּן לְכַטֵּחַ עָלָיו, וְשְׁלִישִׁים יִסְעוּ,  
נֶאֱמַר לְתוֹרָה וְלַתְּשׁוּבָה גְבוּרָה, כְּדִי שִׁתְּגַבֵּר  
אָדָם בְּתוֹרָה וְיִתְגַּבֵּר עַל יִצְרוֹ:

צְפוֹן, מִשֶּׁם הַחֹשֶׁךְ יוֹצֵא לְעוֹלָם, וְכִנְגְדּוֹ  
שֶׁכֶּט דֵּן לְמָה שֶׁהוּא הַחֹשֶׁךְ  
הָעוֹלָם בְּעִבּוּדָה זָרָה שֶׁעָשָׂה יְרֻבְעָם,  
שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר (מ"א י"ב כ"ט) וְאֵת הָאֱחָד נָתַן בְּדָן,  
וְעַלְיוֹ שֶׁכֶט אֲשֶׁר לְהָאִיר אֵת הַחֹשֶׁךְ,  
שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר (דְּבָרִים ל"ג כ"ד) וְטוֹבֵל בְּשֶׁמֶן רִגְלוֹ,  
וְעַלְיוֹ שֶׁכֶט נִפְתְּלִי שֶׁהוּא בְּעַל בְּרָכָה.  
לְאַחֲרוֹנָה יִסְעוּ, שֶׁכָּל מִי שֶׁעוֹבֵד עִבּוּדָה  
זָרָה הוֹלֵךְ לְאַחֹר וְלֹא לְפָנִים.

וְעוֹד דּוֹרְשִׁים  
שֶׁם כְּנִגְדֵן אֶרְבַּע מַחְנוֹת הַמַּלְאָכִים וְכו' שֶׁם  
בְּמִדְרָשׁ. הִיָּה הַכֹּל בְּחֻכְמָה וְכְבוֹד וְגִדְלָה  
לְיִשְׂרָאֵל, וְלִכְךָ יִזְכֵּר הַכְּתוּב הַכֹּל בְּפֶרֶט:



### **Midrash Rabbah - Numbers II:7**

ACCORDING TO THE ENSIGNS (II, 2). There were distinguishing signs for each prince; each had a flag and a different colour for every flag, corresponding to the precious stones on the breast of Aaron. It was from these that governments learned to provide themselves with flags of various colours. Each tribe had its own prince and its flag whose colour corresponded to the colour of its stone. [In Aaron's breast-plate] Reuben's stone was ruby and the colour of his flag was red; and embroidered thereon were mandrakes. Simeon's was topaz and his flag was of a green colour; the town of Shechem was embroidered thereon. Levi's was smaragd and the colour of his flag was a third white, a third black, and a third red; embroidered thereon were the Urim and Thummim. Judah's was a carbuncle and the colour of his flag was something like the heavens; embroidered on it was a lion. Issachar's was a sapphire and the colour of his flag was black like stibium, and embroidered thereon was the sun and moon, in allusion to the text, And of the children of Issachar, men that had understanding of the times (I Chron. XII, 33). Zebulun's was an emerald and the colour of his flag was white, with a ship embroidered thereon, in allusion to the text, Zebulun shall dwell at the shore of the sea (Gen. XLIX, 13). Dan's was jacinth and the colour of his flag was similar to sapphire, and embroidered on it was a serpent, in allusion to the text, Dan shall be a serpent in the way (Gen. XLIX, 17). Gad's was an agate and the colour of his flag was neither white nor black but a blend of black and white; on it was embroidered a camp, in allusion to the text, Gad, a troop shall troop upon him (ib. 19). Naphtali's was an amethyst and the colour of his flag was like clarified wine of a not very deep red; on it was embroidered a hind, in allusion to the text, Naphtali is a hind let loose (ib. 21). Asher's was a beryl and the colour of his flag was like the precious stone with which women adorn themselves; embroidered thereon was an olive-tree, in allusion to the text, As for Asher, his bread shall be fat (ib. 20). Joseph's was an onyx and the colour of his flag was jet black; the embroidered design thereon for both princes, Ephraim and Manasseh, was Egypt, because they were born in Egypt. On the flag of Ephraim was embroidered a bullock, in allusion to the text, His firstling bullock (Deut. XXXIII, 17), which applies to Joshua who came from the tribe of Ephraim. On the flag of the tribe of Manasseh was embroidered a wild ox, in allusion to the text, And his horns are the horns of the wild-ox (Deut. XXXIII, 17), which alludes to Gideon son of Joash who came from the tribe of Manasseh. Benjamin's was jasper and the colour of his flag was a combination of all the twelve colours; embroidered thereon was a wolf, in allusion to the text, Benjamin is a wolf that raveneth (Gen. XLIX, 27). The reason, then, why it is said, ACCORDING TO THE ENSIGNS is because each prince had his own distinguishing sign.