



5783 Divrei Torah on Jerusalem by Rabbi Yosef Bronstein  
 פרשת במדבר/Parashat Bamidbar  
 יום ירושלים/Yom Yerushalayim

## Yom Yerushalayim: The Flag of the Jewish People

Our parsha contains a surprising focus on flags. Instead of simply describing where each tribe camped in relation to the Mishkan, the Torah highlights the role of the flags as a means of organizing the camp: “each person by his flag.”<sup>1</sup> What is the meaning of this? What is the significance of a flag?

The Zohar records a fascinating comment on these verses:

“Each person by his flag” – Rabbi Eliezer opened [his sermon on this verse]: “Rejoice with Yerushalyim:”<sup>2</sup> this joy can only be found when the Jewish people are in the holy land. One verse states, “serve God with joy” and other verse states “serve God with fear.” What is the difference between this verse and the other verse? One verse is for when the Jewish people are in the Holy Land and the other verse is for other times.<sup>3</sup>

This passage associates a joyful service of God with living in the Land of Israel. While not explicated, the connection to the flags of the initial verse seems to be about a feeling of being in one’s proper place. “Each person by his flag” indicates a feeling of hominess, that one is in the place that one is meant to be. Such a feeling enables and generates joy. Conversely, living in the diaspora, away from one’s proper place/flag, engenders feelings of anxiety and fear.

Interestingly, the Zohar does not simply discuss the joy of Eretz Yisrael. Rather, it cites a verse regarding the joy of Yerushalayim. In other words, “Each person next to his flag” is associated in the Zohar with the joy a Jew feels within Yerushalayim.

<sup>1</sup> Bamidbar 1:52.

<sup>2</sup> Yeshayahu 66:10.

<sup>3</sup> This passage is cited and explicated in Rav Moshe Tzvi Neryah, *Yisrael Be-Medinato*, pg. 139.



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Based on the above explanation, the message of this juxtaposition is clear. Yerushalayim is the ultimate home of the Jewish people. Thus, Yerushalayim is the ultimate flag of the Jewish people. It is the place where feel most at home and therefore the most joyful.

Interestingly, the Zohar states that this joyful hominess of Yerushalayim only exists “when the Jewish people are in the Holy Land.” A lone Jew living a poverty stricken and oppressed life in the Yerushalayim of old cannot experience the true joy of Yerushalayim. It is only when the Jewish people return to the Land and are sovereign in their state that Yerushalayim can become our home and our flag.

This teaches us about the special joy of Yom Yerushalayim. For most of Jewish history there were at least a handful of Jews living in Yerushalayim. But this was a city under foreign control. We, however, merit to live in a generation that a Jew can live in a *Jewish* Yerushalayim, at the center of the Jewish people and a Jewish state. In this reality, Yerushalayim can truly be the natural place for each Jew, as per the verse “each person by his flag,” and we can experience the true joy of Yerushalayim.