

CANDLE LIGHTING

8:43 PM

Friday • Erev Shabbos

EREV SHABBOS

25 Tammuz 5786
July 10, 2026

TORAH READING

Matot-Masei
Haftarah: Yirmiyahu
2:4-28, 4:1-2

PIRKEI AVOS

Ch. 1

The Three Weeks

SHABBOS ENDS

9:54 PM

Motzaei Shabbos • Sat night

PARSHAS MATOT-MASEI • THE BANNERS IN THE WILDERNESS

In the Merit of Flags.



Flags in the stands at the World Cup: a lone Israeli flag held up among the others. "Each man by his own flag, with the insignias of their father's house" (Bamidbar 2:2).

On Sunday, June 15, a man named Rony took his father to the World Cup. They are from Los Angeles, avid soccer fans, and Rony had surprised his dad with tickets to the Iran–New Zealand match at SoFi Stadium. He draped an Israeli flag over his shoulders.

They were having a good time. Other fans were giving them love and support. Then stadium stewards approached and told Rony the flag had to come down, for "safety reasons." Rony pointed two rows back, where Palestinian flags were waving untouched. "Why don't you tell them to take down their flag?"

The stewards' answers kept shifting. First it was safety. Then they said the directive came from FIFA itself. Then they said only flags of teams in the match were allowed, which did not explain the Palestinian flags still flying a few rows away. One staffer told Rony that FIFA "only has an issue with ours." When Rony refused to hand it over, he was told: give up the flag or leave the stadium.

He gave up the flag. Then it got worse. Stripped of his flag and singled out, Rony and his family were cursed at, shouted down, and subjected to threats of violence by the crowd around them. His sister and her children, seated nearby, were too frightened to move.

The steward who had taken the flag did nothing to calm the section. FIFA has not publicly commented on the incident.

The message to Jews is: make yourself smaller so others feel bigger. Hide your flag. Lower the profile. Don't provoke.

Rony is now preparing a federal lawsuit against FIFA through the National Jewish Advocacy Center, alleging civil rights violations and endangerment of his family. Their demand is straightforward: FIFA must state publicly that Israeli flags are welcome at World Cup venues on equal terms with all others.

This was not an isolated moment. Before Canada's opening match in Toronto, protesters covered the official FIFA World Cup logo with a banner reading "Kick Israel out of FIFA." In Boston, activists handed Palestinian flags to Scotland fans on the way to their match. The campaign runs at full volume even though Israel is not playing in the tournament.

The Washington Jewish Week put it plainly: the assumption is growing that Jewish and Israeli symbols are "uniquely offensive and therefore uniquely expendable." It is a very old message. And the Torah's answer to it is very old, too.

The Flag G-d Told Us to Raise

In the book of Bamidbar, G-d commanded the Jewish people to camp in the desert under tribal banners: "Each man by his own flag, with the insignias of their father's house" (Bamidbar 2:2). Each tribe had its own *degel*, its own banner, with its own color and its own emblem. Yehudah's was sky blue with a lion. Dan's was sapphire with a serpent. Twelve tribes, twelve flags, planted openly in the wilderness for everyone to see.

The Midrash (Bamidbar Rabbah 2:3) explains where the desire for flags came from. When G-d revealed Himself at Sinai to give the Torah, He descended accompanied by 22,000 angels, each one arrayed under its own banner. The Jewish people saw this and yearned to have banners of their own. G-d replied: you desire flags? I will fulfill your wish. He immediately instructed Moshe: go make them banners, as they desired.

The verse the Midrash cites is from Shir HaShirim, the Song of Songs (2:4): “*He brought me to the house of wine, and His banner over me is love.*” The *degel*, the flag, is not a provocation. It is a sign of love, the visible mark of the bond between a people and the One who chose them.

The Midrash goes further. When the nations of the world saw the Jewish people camped under their banners, they were struck with awe: “*Who is this that looks forth like the dawn, fair as the moon, bright as the sun, awesome as an army with banners?*” (Shir HaShirim 6:10). The nations tried to pull Israel away: join us, we’ll make you governors and commanders. Israel answered: what greatness can you offer us that compares to what G-d gave us in the wilderness, a banner for each tribe?

The Midrash reads the very word *degel* (דגל) as carrying two ideas: *gedulah* (גדולה, grandeur) and *geder* (גדר, definition). A flag is identity. It says: I know who I am, I know where I come from, and I am not hiding it.

Through Every Encampment

This Shabbos we read Parshas Matot-Masei. *Matot* means staffs, the rods of tribal authority, another symbol of identity carried openly. And *Masei* lists every one of the 42 encampments where the Jewish people stopped on their journey through the wilder-

ness, the journey they made under those banners. Forty-two stops in hostile territory, surrounded by nations that did not want them there, and at no point did G-d say: lower the flag for safety. At no point did He say: you are making others uncomfortable, take it down. The flag went up at every encampment.

We read *Masei* during the Three Weeks, the period of mourning between 17 Tammuz and Tisha B’Av, when we remember the destruction of the Temple and the long exile that followed. It is no accident that the Torah places the list of journeys here. Exile is one long series of encampments in places that are not our own. And the question the exile keeps asking, in every generation, is: will you lower your flag?

**Sometimes it is a government decree.
Sometimes it is a steward at a soccer stadium telling a Jewish father that his flag has to come down — while the flag two rows behind him can stay.**

The Midrash Tanchuma takes it one step further. G-d says to Israel: “*In this world you desired flags, and I fulfilled your wish. And in the future to come, in the merit of the flags I will redeem you.*” The flags are not just identity. They are the merit that brings the Geulah. The redemption itself comes because a people refused to lower its banner.

The Torah’s answer has not changed. The flag is not the threat. The flag is not the provocation. It is the sign of a people that G-d organized under banners at Sinai — and the verse that describes it uses the word love.

SOURCES

Bamidbar 2:2 (the tribal banners) · Bamidbar Rabbah 2:3 (angels with banners at Sinai; Israel’s desire for flags; *degel* as *gedulah* and *geder*) · Shir HaShirim 2:4 (“*v’diglo alai ahavah*”) · Shir HaShirim 6:10 (“*ayumah ka’nidgalot*,” the nations’ awe) · Bamidbar 33 (the 42 encampments) · Midrash Tanchuma, Bamidbar 14 (“in the merit of the flags I will redeem you”) · Current events: Fox News, Washington Free Beacon, Jerusalem Post, Washington Jewish Week, Times of Israel, Moment Magazine (June 15 – July 8, 2026).

RAMBAM STUDY SCHEDULE • SHABBOS, 26 TAMMUZ • DAY 159

Daily Rambam

Three chapters a day: Maaseh HaKorbanos, chs. 1–3 · **One chapter a day:** Chameitz U’Matzah, ch. 2 · **Sefer HaMitzvos:** Positive 63; Negative 146; Positive 64.

Sefer HaMitzvos, in brief: the day’s mitzvos turn to the order of the offerings. We are commanded in the procedure of the *olah*, the burnt-offering — every *olah* brought, whether of an individual or of the community, follows one fixed manner (P 63; Vayikra 1:2–3). We are forbidden to eat the flesh of an *olah*, which is given wholly to the altar; one who eats or benefits from it transgresses the law of *me’ilah*, misusing what is sanctified (N 146). And we are commanded in the procedure of the *chatas*, the sin-offering — how it is slaughtered, what is burned on the altar, and what is eaten by the Kohanim (P 64; Vayikra 6:18).