

Toronto Torah

Beit Midrash Zichron Dov

Parshiyot Bamidbar

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Indivisible, Individual or Both?

Rabbi Dovid Zirkind

Common practice, when gathering a minyan for davening, is to count the number of people present using a verse of ten words rather than use numbers. (Kitzur Shulchan Aruch 15:3) In fact, this custom developed from a concept expressed multiple times in the Talmud, relating the dangers that result from counting a group of people numerically, isolating individuals from the strength of their community. The Gemara (Berachot 62b) suggests that this was the reason why so many people were killed in a plague immediately following the survey conducted by Dovid haMelech. His mistake is described as something that even "schoolchildren" understand, namely, the risk of counting the nation without some form of atonement to counterbalance the survey. In Parshat Ki Tisa (Shemot 30:2) we are told that when the people were counted, each person was to give a half-shekel to prevent a catastrophe, but apparently Dovid HaMelech's neglect of this principle was costly.

In his commentary to our parshah, Ramban argues that a great leader like Dovid haMelech could not have forgotten such a well-founded halachah, despite the Talmud's assertion that his mistake was basic. (Ramban to Bamidbar 1:3) Indeed, Ramban says Dovid haMelech did count properly. Ramban suggests that the expression *tifkidu* [count] used in our parshah (rather than the more common *tispiru*) implies that the count was done with the appropriate precautions, and the same terminology is used for the survey

of Dovid haMelech, indicating that his mistake was not that of forgetting the half-shekel. Where, then, did he err?

One suggestion offered by Ramban is that Dovid haMelech's survey was broader than that of our parshah; it included males as young as thirteen, while the survey in Bamidbar began at the age of twenty. Alternatively, Ramban suggests that the half-shekel's merit only protects against the *ayin hara* of a census that is absolutely necessary, but Dovid haMelech's census was merely conducted to better appreciate the greatness of his empire. The decision to conduct a survey under those circumstances was deemed inappropriate, resulting in a heavenly punishment.

The practice of not counting a minyan explicitly, with which we began, seems to be an extension of this second approach of Ramban. Even when the counting is a necessary prerequisite for prayer, if an alternative presents itself (namely, counting with a pasuk) it is preferable to avoid counting individuals. The fear that we should never isolate an individual through counting compels us to avoid doing so, even for the greatest of causes.

It is said that Rabbi Meir Simcha of Dvinsk (1843-1926) was visited by students when he was ill, towards the end of his life. His students requested that Tehillim be recited in his merit, but Rabbi Meir Simcha declined. He explained that his merit was a function of

his integration within the community; praying for him as an individual would isolate him from them, depriving him of the community's virtue. It has been suggested that this is the reason we recite the phrase "*bitoch shaar cholei yisrael*" – amongst the other ill members of Israel" in our prayers for the sick, so that none should be judged as an individual. (Peninim MiShulchan Gavoah, Bamidbar 1:3)

While the above discussion clearly highlights the danger in counting the Jewish people, a number of midrashim run contrary to it in describing G-d's close awareness of His chosen nation. For example, Rabbeinu Bechaye (to Bamidbar 1:3) cites a midrash that likens the Jewish people to G-d's finest crop, which He measures precisely. Rashi expresses a similar idea regarding the seeming repetition of the names of Jews who descended to Egypt, saying that G-d repetitively counts the people whom He loves. (Shemot 1:1) How then, are we to understand the hesitancy with which our tradition approaches the census?

One potential distinction could be made between surveys that were conducted by human beings and those which were done by G-d Himself. Human nature requires the surveyor to individualize the subjects of his assessment, and the possibility of dangerous isolation becomes a reality. On the other hand, G-d's meticulous accounting of his flock is an objective look at the deeds that make each person unique; it does not compromise the communal link each person possesses. With our strength rooted in community, G-d is still able to examine each of us in our individuality without dividing us from our people as a whole. Our goal should be to strive for a similarly appreciative perspective on the other members of the society in which we live; to develop the ability to admire the important role they play in moving our society forward along with their individual achievements.

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Honey on Shavuot?

Hillel Horovitz

כל השנה כולה אנו ממשילים את התורה למים ולקמח, לאותם מוצרים בסיסיים המספקים לנו חיות. התורה נמשלת לשגרה היומיומית של חיינו המספקת את כל מחסורנו ובאמת אין אנו זקוקים לדבר מבלעדיה. אולם, בחג השבועות מנסים אנו להביא לידי ביטוי פן נוסף ומהותי בתורה. בחג השבועות אנו משחזרים את מתן תורה, את אותה חוויה חד פעמית של מתיקות אין קץ בשעת קבלת התורה, לכן אך טבעי שנאכל את הדבש המסמל מתיקות דומה.

ה"רוקח" מתאר טקס בו ילדים רכים בשנים מלקקים את אותיות ה"אלף" "בית", טקסיות שמטרתה הכנסת טעם ומתיקות ללמוד התורה. כפי שאותו ילד שומר איתו את המתיקות מבקורו הראשון ב"חדר" כך אנו רוצים לשמר את אותה מתיקות של המפגש הראשוני שלנו עם התורה. כפי שאנו אוכלים תפוח בדבש בראש השנה כדי למשוך מתיקות לכל השנה כך נאכל דבש בשבועות ונמתיק את לימוד התורה שלנו לכל השנה כולה.

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כאשר אנו עומדים בפתחו של חג השבועות ומדמיינים את הריחות שעולים מן המטבח רובנו נוהגים לחשוב על ריח של עוגות גבינה. הסיבה לכך נעוצה במנהג שהביא ספר הכל-בו (מאה 15, מחבר לא ידוע):

"גם נהגו לאכול דבש וחלב בחג שבועות מפני התורה שנמשלה לדבש וחלב כמו שכתוב (שיר השירים ד, יא) "דבש וחלב תחת לשונך".

אנו רואים שנתקבל המנהג לאכול מאכלי חלב בחג השבועות, אולם לא נעלם הדבש? עניין זה תמוה עוד יותר כאשר מעיינים בספר הרוקח:

"כעלות השחר יום עצרת מביאין הנערים על שם בהיות הבקר ויהי קולות וברקים... ונותן על הלוח מעט דבש ולוחך הנער הדבש שעל האותיות בלשונו ואחר כך מביאין העוגה שנילושה בדבש וכתוב עליה ד' אלקים נתן לי לשון לימודים..."

מה"רוקח" נראה בבירור כי הדבש שימש כמוטיב מרכזי בחג השבועות, ואילו החלב לא מוזכר כאן כלל. אם כן, לא נעלם הדבש!?

הרב קוק בספרו עולת ראייה (ח"א קמ"ד) על מהותו של הדבש כותב "הדבש הוא מורה על תוכן של הנאה, ומתיקות והחשת עונג מוחשי, הקשורות עמו...". מסביר הרב קוק כי מהותו של הדבש היא מהות של מתיקות וענג זו אחת הסיבות שאין הדבש קרב על המזבח. הרב קוק מורה לנו כי עובד ד' המקריב קרבן חייב להרגיש את המתיקות והנועם מעצם עבודת ד' והקרבת הקרבן, ולא להיעזר בגורמים חיצוניים כמו דבש להמתיק את עבודתו, כי אז הוא מתחנך לא לעסוק במהות אלא בהנאה מגורמים זרים חיצוניים. מטרת ציווי זה היא לחנך אותנו ע"י הקרבן לעמידה אמיתית, ללא זיוף, מול הבורא.

Hitoriri:

Jewish Spirituality

Ruth of La Mancha R' Mordechai Torczyner

Ruth had been ruined by her life with Jews; her wealthy husband had died, along with his brother and father, and the family's wealth was gone. Now her mother-in-law was preparing to return to a place where Moabites were persona non grata - and Ruth insisted on accompanying her.

Naami was astounded; what practical gain could be in store for an impoverished, friendless Moabite in a Jewish land? But Ruth insisted, "Don't plead with me to leave you, to cease following you. Where you will go, I will go." The book of Ruth doesn't tell us what inspired her, only that she was idealistically certain that this was the nation and the G-d to whom she would commit her life.

Judaism tends toward the pragmatic: We focus on this world rather than meditate on reward in the afterlife. We save lives in violation of most mitzvot. We recognize civil government. Nonetheless, Judaism has a long history of honouring the quixotic charge of the idealist: Avraham and Sarah welcomed strangers in the name of Gd. The Jews declared, "We will do and we will hear," pledging obedience to a law they did not yet know. Our vision of Mashiach is of a pauper riding a donkey.

To borrow a passage from Man of La Mancha, "Maddest of all [is] to see life as it is, and not as it should be." This idealism is a most Jewish concept; Judaism nods to the pragmatic, but it **reverses** the idealistic.

We have just finished commemorating a seven-week trek during which an entire nation was challenged to metamorphose from slaves into idealists. A slave cannot afford ideology, and throughout the desert trek a slavish pragmatism was quite visible; the constant attention to food and water reflected a mind that could not see past its most immediate needs. But, eventually, this nation stood at Sinai and established that idealism which would become Ruth's mark. On Shavuot we read Ruth's story, and challenge ourselves: Will we establish that idealism, too?

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613 Mitzvot: #153-158, 162-165 Seeing Kosher, Eating Kosher Rabbi Mordechai Torczyner

Like mitzvot 73 (against eating an animal that died from a wound or illness rather than from shechitah) and 147 (against eating certain animal fats), mitzvot 153 to 158 and 162 to 165 govern our diet with the laws of kashrut.

Kashrut may be about more than eating certain foods and not others, though. Not only are we obligated to eat only kosher animals (#154), fish (#156) and birds (#157), and not to eat insects and other crawling creatures (#162-165), but Rambam

contends that we are commanded to identify the signs of kashrut from the fish (#155), animal (#153) or kosher locust (#158) ourselves, in order for a particular creature to be kosher. Other authorities, including Ramban, maintain that we are obligated to eat only kosher creatures, but we are not required to observe their signs of kashrut ourselves.

For more on this debate, see Sefer haMitzvot Aseh 149-152 and Ramban's challenges to Sefer haMitzvot Shoresh 6.

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**Torah in Translation
An Essay on Faith**

Rav Elchanan Wasserman

Kovetz Maamarim, Maamar al haEmunah

Translated by R' Ezra Goldschmiedt

"And you shall not stray after your heart' (Bamidbar 15:39) refers to heresy..." (Berachot 12b)

The cause of heresy appears to be the corruption of the intellect and the mind, and the place where knowledge is seated in man is the head, not the heart. If this is so, then it would be [more] appropriate to warn, "Do not stray after your intellect and your head!"

...Additionally, belief is included in the commandments, in which all of Israel are obligated immediately upon reaching maturity, i.e. a boy of thirteen years and a girl of twelve years. It is known that in the matter of belief, the greatest of philosophers, like Aristotle, regarding whom the Rambam testified that his intellect was just below prophecy, stumbled... How is it possible for the holy Torah to obligate all children to understand in their young minds more than Aristotle?

...When we contemplate it, we will find that belief that the Holy One, blessed is He, created the world is obvious to any sensible person who is simply not insane. There is no need for any philosophy whatsoever to grasp this knowledge... If we would imagine a man born with full intellectual capabilities, immediately from the time of birth, behold, we could not comprehend the extent of his astonishment in instantaneously seeing the heavens and their forces, the land and all that is upon it. When we would ask this man to answer whether the world he sees now for the first time was made by itself without any intention, or whether it was made by a wise Creator, behold, when he would contemplate this in his mind he would answer without a doubt that this was made with wondrous wisdom and superior order... If so, then the opposite [of the question asked above] is very odd and inexplicable: How are the great philosophers so closed off as to say that the world was created by chance?

The solution to the riddle can be found in the holy Torah, which reveals to us all that is closed; it is the verse, "You shall not take a bribe, for bribery blinds the eyes of the wise." (Devarim 16:19) In accordance with the Torah view, the threshold of bribery is [even] the value of a minimal coin... It is a

Rabbi Elchanan Wasserman (1874-1941) was born in Birz, Lithuania to Rabbi Naftali Beinisch, a shopkeeper. At first studying under the guidance of Rabbi Shimon Shkop of the Telshe Yeshiva, he later met Rabbi Chaim Soloveitchik at a health resort, where he became deeply attached to the latter's personality and method of learning. It is said that Rabbi Shkop was concerned with the "why" in his studies, while Rabbi Soloveitchik would say that "one must know what is stated, not why." Rabbi Wasserman was deeply influenced by both of his teachers and developed his own approach.

At the age of 32, Rabbi Wasserman chose to step down from his position as Rosh Yeshiva in Amtchislav to learn in the Radin kollel of the Chofetz Chaim, who became yet another role model. After years of study, Rabbi Wasserman returned to teaching as a Rosh Yeshiva in Brisk and Baranovitch, where he attracted hundreds of disciples. In addition to his formal study and teaching, he was also a popular thinker, known for applying Torah concepts to contemporary events. He believed that just as the Torah gives us guidance in halachic matters, so it guides our outlook on the events of our time.

In 1939, Rabbi Wasserman traveled to America to raise funds for his yeshiva. He could have remained there to stay safe from the impending disaster of the Holocaust, but he returned to Europe to be with his students. His life was taken by the Nazis ש"מ in 1941.

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law of nature in the forces of a man's soul, that desire shall hold influence over the mind...

The foundations of faith in and of themselves are simple and obvious to every man who is not in the category of the insane; it is impossible to be in doubt of its truth. However, [this is] only on condition that the man is not bribed, i.e. that he is free from the lusts of this world and from his own desires. If so, then the cause of heresy and denial, is not rooted in corruption of the mind itself, but in his desires for his lusts, which sways and blinds his mind. Now it is well understood that the Torah's warning, "And you shall not stray after your heart," refers to heresy. Man is cautioned to humble and subjugate his will in order for the mind to be free from the leanings of his will; automatically, he will recognize the truth that is obvious to any sensible person, that the Holy One, blessed is He, created the world...

Many are familiar with the midrash regarding mountains which contended to host the presentation of the Torah. One of these was Mount Carmel; you can find more about Mount Carmel in Torah for Vayigash 5771. Here, we will speak of one of the mountain's communities: Tirat Carmel.

Tirat Carmel, a city of about 20,000 residents, is found on the western slope of Mount Carmel, near the Dania neighbourhood of Haifa and near Kfar Galim.

Archaeologists have uncovered finds from the Byzantine period on the site of Tirat Carmel. An Arab village named Attira was located in the area from Ottoman times until the modern age; its residents intimidated the rest of the area through petty theft, banditry and murder. After November 29, 1947, when the end of the British Mandate was declared and the establishment of the State of Israel was initiated, the attacks from Attira residents increased. A December attempt by the Etsel organization to conquer the area failed, as Iraqi forces aided the Arab residents.

With the end of the first cease-fire in the 1948 War of Independence, the IDF created a special force to take the area. Attira was defeated on the morning of July 16, 1948, and the Israeli flag flew over the municipal buildings in the centre of the city. After the War of Independence, with the re-settlement of hundreds of thousands of immigrants from around the world, neighbourhoods of temporary housing were established. Two neighbourhoods were established in Tirat Carmel – Northern Tirah and Southern Tirah. The two neighbourhoods merged into Tirat Carmel in 1954, and became an official city in 1992.

Today, Tirat Carmel is an attractive city, offering high quality education, culture and business. The city includes a Torah-observant community and a *garin Torani* nucleus of young families attempting to further invigorate Jewish life. The Torah may not have been given on Mount Carmel, but the light of Torah illuminates it today.

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Why did Hashem command a census at the start of our parshah?

Rashi comments that because of HaShem's love for the Jewish people, He counted them at many junctions in their history. The first count was after they left Egypt, the second after the sin of the Golden Calf (to see how many were killed). This third count came as the *Shechinah* (Divine presence) was about to rest amongst the Jewish people.

Rashbam suggests that this count was preparation for the wars associated with entering Israel. It was necessary to know exactly how many soldiers were available for battle. **Ramban** supports this approach and adds that entering Israel would lead to a division of property for each tribe. A census was necessary to account for the portion each tribe would receive.

In an additional approach, **Ramban** highlights the role Moshe and Aharon would play in the census. By counting each Jew personally, in addition to having the tribal leaders count, the leaders would have a personal interaction with each individual Jew and would be able to pray for their well-being.

Why were the Levites not counted as part of the national census?

Rashi offers two explanations for this exclusion: First, the Levites had

attained an elevated status as result of their positions in the mishkan, and so it was appropriate that they be counted separately. Alternatively, **Rashi** suggests that Hashem knew that those included in the larger census would be killed in the desert. He wanted to exclude the Levites because they had refrained from worshipping the Golden Calf.

Ibn Ezra notes that the purpose of the census was military. Since the Levites were charged with operating the Mishkan and were excluded from going to war, there was no need to count them here.

Why are the children of Aharon described as descendants of Aharon and Moshe?

Rashi cites Sanhedrin 19b which derives from this pasuk that one who teaches Torah to the son of his friend is considered as if he had produced that child. As Moshe's students, the children of Aharon are described as the children of Moshe in addition to being children of Aharon.

Some commentaries wonder why Aharon's children stood out from the rest of the Children of Israel; why is Moshe only described as the father of these four? **Siftei Chachamim** explains that Moshe was commanded to teach all of Israel, but he chose to go above and beyond that obligation with his nephews. In a similar vein, **Netziv** suggests that the sons of Aharon were

the first students to whom Moshe taught the details of the spoken Torah. The depth of the oral tradition, argues the *Netziv*, forges the strong relationship between student and teacher described in this gemara. The rest of Israel would not have this experience until they crossed the Jordan at the end of Moshe's life.

Ohr Hachaim suggests that they are described as the children of Moshe because Elazar and Itamar were saved by Moshe. In *Devarim* (9:20) Moshe describes the prayer with which he beseeched Hashem not to kill Aharon and his sons after the sin of the Golden Calf. Saving their lives is tantamount to fathering them.

For children: Why does the Torah say that Moshe counted the Levites "on the word of HaShem?"

Rashi recounts a dialogue between Moshe and Hashem. Moshe turned to Hashem and asked, "How will I enter their tents to find out how many children are in each home?" Hashem responded, "You do your job, and I will do Mine." When Moshe went to each tent, a voice from Heaven called out the number of children in the home.

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Schedule for May 26 - June 1 / 5 - 11 Sivan

Shabbat May 26 EREV SHAUVUOT

10:20 AM R' Baruch Weintraub, Parshah, Clanton Park

7:45 PM R' Mordechai Torczyner, Daf Yomi: Niddah 5, BAYT

Sunday-Monday May 27-28

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YESHIVAT OR CHAIM

ZICHRON YISROEL of the AHS

Tuesday, May 29

1:30 PM R' Mordechai Torczyner, Chavakuk *Mekorot*, Shaarei Shomayim *not this week*

7:15 PM R' Ezra Goldschmiedt, Ramban, BAYT

8:00 PM Hillel Horovitz, The Early Prophets, Bnai Torah

Wednesday, May 30

10:00 AM R' Mordechai Torczyner, Dramas of Jewish History: Zionism, BEBY, with Melton

12:30 PM R' Mordechai Torczyner, Business Ethics Lunch 2 of 4: Unethical Co-Workers, at Zeifmans 201 Bridgeland

7:30 PM Yair Manas, Responsa, Clanton Park, *not this week*

8:00 PM R' Dovid Zirkind, Gemara Beitzah, 2nd Perek, Shaarei Shomayim

8:30 PM R' Mordechai Torczyner, Living Midrash: Before the Beginning, BAYT, *women not this week*

8:30 PM R' Baruch Weintraub, Hilchot Melachim, Shomrai Shabbos, *men*

Friday, June 1

8:00 AM R' Dovid Zirkind, Friday Parshah Preview, Village Shul

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Contact canada@yu.edu or 416-783-6960