

In this week's *Parashah*, *Bnei Yisrael* are counted. R' Moshe ben Nachman z"l (*Ramban*; 1194-1270; Spain and *Eretz Yisrael*) notes that each individual was required to appear before Moshe and Aharon to be counted; it was not sufficient for a head of household to report how many people shared his home.

R' Meshulam Feish Segal Lowy z"l (the *Tosher Rebbe* in post-War Hungary and, from 1951, in Montreal, Canada) writes: This is meant to teach us the importance of every Jew, in line with the *Halachah* (see *Beitzah* 3b), "That which is counted cannot be nullified." [Literally, this means the following: In certain situations, a prohibited substance is considered nullified in a mixture if the majority of the mixture consists of a permitted substance. However, when the prohibited substance is something that is commonly sold by number--for example, an egg, which is typically sold by the dozen--that prohibited substance is considered "important" and the principle of nullification does not apply.] Thus we read (*Bemidbar* 1:2), continues the *Tosher Rebbe*, "Elevate every head in the assembly of *Bnei Yisrael* . . ." By counting each individual, you will elevate him!

This lesson was taught in last week's *Parashah*, as well, the *Tosher Rebbe* writes. There we read (*Vayikra* 26:3-4), "If you will follow My decrees and observe My commandments and perform them, then I will provide your rains in their time, and the land will give its produce and the tree of the field will give its fruit." Every individual, through his *Mitzvah* observance, can influence the success or failure of the harvest [or, in our terms, the economy]. (*Avodat Avodah: Pitgamei Kodesh, Bechukotai* 3)

Bitachon

So far this year--a Shemittah year--we have devoted this space to discussing the related subject of Bitachon / placing one's trust in Hashem. This week, we conclude that discussion.

Our Sages say that when our ancestors stood at *Har Sinai* and declared, "*Na'aseh ve'nishmah*" / "We will do and we will hear," the *Zohamah* (literally, poison) of the sin of Adam *Ha'rishon* left them. How did their declaration repair the damage done by Adam's sin?

R' Yosef Yoizel Horowitz z"l (1847-1919; the *Alter* of Novardok) explains: Commentaries write that, before Adam sinned, he had no *Yetzer Ha'ra* / inclination to sin. If so, how did he sin? The answer is that, before Adam sinned, he knew right from wrong objectively. He still had free choice to sin--the same way we, today, have free choice whether to place our hands in a burning furnace. We have that choice, but we know objectively that it is a bad idea.

The *Nachash* / serpent persuaded Chava, who then persuaded Adam, that the Torah's command was merely "advice," and that they could serve *Hashem* better a different way, *i.e.*, if they not only had the theoretical ability to sin but also a temptation to sin, and then they overcame that temptation. Somehow, eating from the Tree of Knowledge would implant that temptation within them, and that is why they agreed to eat from it.

In essence, writes the *Alter*, Adam's sin was choosing to serve *Hashem* the way that felt right to Adam, rather than the way that *Hashem* wanted to be served. "*Na'aseh ve'nishmah*" / "We will do and we will hear" was a declaration that *Bnei Yisrael* were prepared to serve *Hashem* ("to do") without question and before getting any explanations ("to hear")--a declaration of their willingness to follow the Torah's dictates blindly without compromise, asking only how to do what needs to be done.

The *Gemara* (*Shabbat* 88a) teaches: "When *Bnei Yisrael* declared, '*Na'aseh ve'nishmah*,' *Hashem* asked, 'Who revealed this secret to My children?'" What is the "secret"? The *Alter* explains that the secret, which most people don't know, is that the greatest obstacle to serving *Hashem* properly is man's innate desire to question and understand before submitting to authority. - **Continued in box inside** -

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“You shall make the festival of *Shavuot* for *Hashem*, your *Elokim* . . .

“You shall rejoice before *Hashem*, your *Elokim* -- you, your son, your daughter, your slave, your maidservant, the Levite who is in your cities, the proselyte, the orphan, and the widow who are among you -- in the place that *Hashem*, your *Elokim*, will choose to rest His Name.

“You shall remember that you were a slave in Egypt, and you shall guard and perform these decrees.” (*Devarim* 16:10-12 – from the Torah reading for the second day of *Shavuot*)

R' Nossan Lewin z"l (1857-1926; rabbi of Rzeszów, Poland) writes: In connection with *Pesach*, we speak of the “Four Expressions of Redemption,” and we drink four cups of wine to recall them. In connection with *Shavuot*, also, we find four expressions in the verses above. They are:

- “ועשית” / “You shall make the festival of *Shavuot*”;
- “ושמחת” / “You shall rejoice before *Hashem*”;
- “וזכרת” / “You shall remember”;
- “ושמרת” / “You shall guard.”

Granted, we do not drink four cups of wine to recall these expressions. Nevertheless, writes R' Lewin, they do teach us important principles.

“ועשית” / “You shall make [literally, ‘do’] the festival of *Shavuot*”: There are those who claim that it is not necessary to perform *Mitzvot*; it is sufficient to be a Jew in one’s heart. That is not the Torah’s perspective. Rather, *Mitzvot* are meant to be “done.” Of course, our thoughts are important too. Indeed, a complete *Mitzvah* consists of an action -- the *Mitzvah*’s “body,” so-to-speak -- and a thought -- the *Mitzvah*’s “soul.” The reason G-d put us in a physical world, however, is to perform physical actions.

“ושמחת” / “You shall rejoice before *Hashem*”: The emphasis here is on “before *Hashem*.” Unlike frivolity, joy “before *Hashem*” includes a measure of trepidation, as we read (*Tehilim* 2:11), “Rejoice with trembling.” How is this joy expressed? The verse answers: By sharing our joy with those who are in need, “the Levite who is in your cities, the proselyte, the orphan, and the widow who are among you.”

“וזכרת” / “You shall remember”: The foundation of our faith is remembrance; specifically, remembering the miracles and acts of kindness that *Hashem* has performed for our ancestors and for us. This remembrance leads to thanksgiving. How do we express our gratitude? By keeping the *Mitzvot* in their minutest details. Indeed, that is all *Hashem* asks of us.

“ושמרת” / “You shall guard”: Be on guard not to do anything against G-d’s Will. Remember! Actions that hurt other people are also contrary to His Will. (Bet Nadiv p.99)

“*Bnei Yisrael* shall encamp, each man near his banner according to the insignias of their fathers’ households.” (2:2)

The *Midrash Rabbah* comments on this verse: Thus it is written (*Tehilim* 20:6), “May we sing in joy at Your salvation, and raise our banner in the Name of our *Elokim* . . .” [Until here from the *Midrash*]

What is the connection between our verse and the quoted verse in *Tehilim* (other than the coincidence of the word “banner”), and what is the *Midrash* teaching? R' Eliezer David Gruenwald z"l (1867-1928; Hungarian rabbi and *Rosh Yeshiva*; his *Yahrzeit* is 2 *Sivan*) answers:

The *Midrash Shocher Tov* says, as if speaking to *Hashem*, “When the Temple stood, You used to answer our prayers. Now that there is only a mountain, You also should answer, as it is written (*Tehilim* 3:5), ‘He answers me from His holy mountain.’” This may be understood, R' Gruenwald explains, based on another *Midrash*. The Torah says, regarding the location of *Akeidat Yitzchak* (*Bereishit* 22:4), “He [Avraham] saw the place from afar.” The verse does not say that Avraham saw the mountain from afar. In fact, the *Midrash* says, the future site of *Akeidat Yitzchak* and the *Bet Ha'mikdash* was not yet a mountain; the location was in a valley until Avraham prayed that it become a mountain as befits *Hashem*’s glory. R' Gruenwald observes: Since the mountain was formed specifically to hold the Temple, we may interpret the fact that it still is a mountain long after the Temple was destroyed as a sign to us and to the world that the *Shechinah* still rests there. [If *Hashem* had wanted, He easily could have arranged for the Romans to “bulldoze” the entire mountain, as they did in other places.] In light of this, R' Gruenwald writes, we can understand the *Midrash Shocher Tov* quoted above: “When the Temple stood, You used to answer our prayers. Now that there is only a mountain” -- since there is still a mountain, which tells us that You are still with us -- “You also should answer.”

Now, R' Gruenwald concludes, we can understand the *Midrash* on our verse: “May we sing in joy at Your salvation” -- referring to the fact that *Hashem* makes His presence felt at the former location of the *Bet Hamikdash*, which brings honor to Him and is, so-to-speak, His salvation. “Raise our banner in the Name of our *Elokim*” -- it is as if He is waving a banner to indicate His presence. So, too, the *Midrash* is teaching, the banners that marked the encampment of the tribes in the desert brought glory to *Hashem*. (Keren L'David)

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How can a person defeat that temptation? The *Alter* writes: The answer is *Bitachon*--which here means believing that the Torah was given for our own good, that we must observe the Torah to the absolute limit of our ability and trust that *Hashem* will help us to observe further once we have exhausted our capabilities (but only if we have truly exhausted our capabilities), that we cannot improve on what the Torah demands (as Adam *Ha'rishon* tried to do), and we can never succeed by trying to outsmart the Torah.

(*Madregat Ha'adam: Ma'amar Be'tukufot Ha'olam*)