
פרשת כי תשא

פרק ל פסוק יב

כִּי תִשָּׂא אֶת־רֹאשׁ בְּנֵי־יִשְׂרָאֵל לִפְקֹדֵיהֶם וְנִתְּנוּ אִישׁ כְּפָר נַפְשׁוֹ לִי-הֲנֶה בְּפֹקֵד אַתֶּם וְלֹא־יִהְיֶה בָּהֶם נֶגֶף בְּפֹקֵד אַתֶּם:

רש"י

כְּשֶׁתִּחַפְּזֵן לְקַבֵּל סְכּוּם מִנִּינָם לְדַעַת כְּמָה הֵם, אֵל תִּמְנֵם לְגִלְגֵּלֶת, אֵלָּא יִתְּנוּ כָּל אֶחָד מִחֲצִית הַשֶּׁקֶל, וְתִמְנֶה אֶת הַשֶּׁקֶלִים וְחִדַּע מִנִּינָם: וְלֹא יִהְיֶה בָּהֶם נֶגֶף. שֶׁהַמְּנִין שׁוֹלֵט בּוֹ עֵין הָרַע וְהַדָּבָר בָּא עֲלֵיהֶם, כְּמוֹ שֶׁמְצִינּוּ בִימֵי דָוִד:

מושג

שהמנין שולט בו עין הרע

Translation:

Because counting invites the power of the Evil Eye.

Explanation:

When one unnecessarily counts his or her possessions they feel a certain sense of pride¹. This feeling causes an עין הרע to take hold. The power of the עין הרע does not allow for ברכה to attach itself to the possessions. The same holds true when counting people to gauge our power, and may even result in a plague. The negative effects of counting people may be deflected through the giving of a מחצית השקל which acts as an atonement. People may not be counted directly even for a מצוה.

Looking in the Pasuk:

The Pasuk clearly states that the מחצית השקל is required to ensure that the counting does not cause a plague. The word that introduces the counting תשא, usually meaning to lift, needs explanation². Perhaps the Torah is informing that the inevitable result of such an unnecessary census will be כי תשא, a swelling of pride among בני ישראל, which will bring an עין הרע and cause a plague.

Musag Learning Outcomes:

Know: Counting בני ישראל unnecessarily, even indirectly, is forbidden and can cause a plague. Giving a מחצית השקל deflects the plague. Unnecessarily counting possessions causes a loss of ברכה. Counting for purposes of a מצוה may be done indirectly.

Understand: Counting people directly reduces their significance to their physical selves and is always prohibited. In addition, counting for no other purpose than to take pride in our possessions of power is forbidden as it causes an עין הרע to take hold.

1 See notes #1&2.

2 See note #3

NOTES

1. The prohibition to count the Jewish people seems to be rather severe as it brings with it the very real threat of a plague. Indeed at the end of (פרק כד) we read of a terrible plague, which killed 70,000 of בני ישראל, which came as the result of a census that דוד המלך had taken. Why is counting the people such a grave sin? Also, if indeed counting the people is prohibited why does Hashem deem counting בני ישראל an act of endearment, as Rashi taught in the beginning of Sefer Bamidbar: מתוך חבתו לפניו מונה אותם כל שעה³. And finally, why at times can people be counted directly, at times only through giving an object, and at times only by giving a מחצית השקל⁴?

As we will learn in the coming note, counting the people can be broken down into three categories. a. Hashem counting. b. Counting that involves a מצוה. c. Counting that does not involve a מצוה. When Hashem counts He does so directly. Moreover, counting that is done by man may never be done directly⁵. However, even indirect counting is only permitted where there is a מצוה or a constructive purpose involved. When there is no real purpose to the counting even indirect counting is forbidden. The above idea is reflected in the Midrash which teaches:

מִנְיָן שֶׁהוּא לְצוּרֵךְ אֵין בּוֹ חֶסְרוֹן, מִנְיָן שֶׁאֵין בּוֹ צוּרֵךְ יֵשׁ בּוֹ חֶסְרוֹן (פסיקתא רבתי יא-ג)

When counting (even indirectly) is done for no purpose, a plague will ensue. The only way to deflect the plague is by the giving of a מחצית השקל⁶.

I would propose that the logic behind the above is as follows:

When Hashem tells אברהם אבינו that counting the Jewish people is tantamount to trying to count the stars,⁷ He is telling Avrohom that the Jewish people can never truly be counted. This is obviously not a physical statement, but rather reflecting the fact that each person's value goes far beyond the physical body that one may count. Counting a singular person as 'one' reduces his significance to his physical being. It ignores his spiritual value which is incalculable⁸. For this reason it is forbidden to count בני ישראל directly even for the purpose of a מצוה as the Gemoroh in Yoma teaches: אסור למנות את ישראל אפילו לדבר מצוה

Of course the exception to this rule would be when Hashem counts, for Hashem sees beyond the physical, as the Pasuk teaches:

וַיֹּאמֶר ה' אֶל־שְׂמוּאֵל אֶל־תִּבְבֹּט אֶל־מִרְאֵהוּ וְאֶל־גִּבַּת קוֹמָתוֹ כִּי מֵאֲסִיתִיהוּ כִּי לֹא אֶשְׂרַר יְרָאֵה הָאָדָם כִּי הָאָדָם יְרָאֵה לְעֵינָיו וְה' יְרָאֵה לְלִבָּב: (שמואל א טז:ז).

In fact when Hashem counts the effect is quite the opposite. For when Hashem counts the person He does so not to minimize the person's importance, but rather to provide the person with significance. He is showing the person that he truly 'counts' in Hashem's eyes and is worthy to be noticed. This is what Rashi means when he tells us מתוך חבתו לפניו מונה אותם כל שעה. The love Hashem has for each and every Jew thus supplies the reason why He counts us and, at the same time, the reason why such a counting does not cause a plague⁹.

Accordingly, it is now obvious that if one counts through each person giving an object then the prohibition does not apply¹⁰, for in such a situation one's significance is in no way reduced.

3 במדבר סיני באחד לחדש. מתוך חבתו לפניו מונה אותם כל שעה. כְּשֶׁיִצְאוּ מִמִּצְרַיִם מִנְיָן (שמות יב:לז), וְכִשְׁפָּלוּ בְּעֵגֶל (שמות לב:לה) מִנְיָן לִידַע [מִנְיָן] הַגּוֹתְרִים, דְּשָׂבָא לְהַשְׁרוֹת שְׂכִינְתוֹ עָלֵיהֶם מִנְיָם. בְּאֶחָד בְּנִיטוֹן הַיּוֹם הַמִּשְׁכֵּן וּבְאֶחָד בְּאֵיר מִנְיָם:

4 Hashem counts בני ישראל directly, counted with objects, and here we see a מחצית השקל is required.

5 What is considered indirectly counting is not clear. For example it is obvious using an object is permitted. As we will see, we learn this from the fact that King Shaul counted by having each person give a sheep. However, it seems from the Gemoroh in Yoma, that only counting the body is a problem, but counting of hands would be permitted.

6 We will provide the sources for this in the next note.

7 וַיִּצְאֵהוּ אֶת־הַחֹצֵה וַיֹּאמֶר הַבְּטִינָה שְׂמִימָה וּסְפֹר הַכּוֹכָבִים אִם־יִתְּכַל לְסַפֵּר אֹתָם וַיֹּאמֶר לוֹ פֹה יִהְיֶה נִרְעָה: (בראשית טו:ה)

8 In this vein we find ל"ח מאמרי חז"ל in which individual people are occasionally counted as multiples. For example: ויכו מהם אנשי העי כשלושים וששה איש (יהושע ז). ותניא: שלשים וששה ממש, דברי רבי יהודה. אמר לו רבי נחמיה: וכי שלשים וששה היו? והלא לא נאמר אלא כשלושים וששה איש, אלא: זה יאיר בן מנשה ששקול כנגד רובה של סנהדרין (סנהדרין מד).

9 That is to say that Hashem is not only the reason why Hashem wants to count us, but also seeks to teach that since the counting is done from love, to display Hashem's recognition of each Jew's unique value, therefore such a counting has no adverse effects.

10 We may now be able to understand why the Gemoroh in Yoma teaches us that it is permissible to count hands, for the negative effect is created only when the body is counted.

This above raises the following question: Why did Hashem command to give a מחצית השקל as a כפרה in order to deflect a plague, why could they not simply give a token, such as a small pebble or piece of pottery?

The answer is that there is another issue. The Gemoroh (מסכת תענית ה:) teaches:

אין הברכה מצויה לא בדבר השקול ולא בדבר המדוד ולא בדבר המנווי אלא בדבר הסמוי מן העין. תנא דבי רבי ישמעאל: אין הברכה מצויה אלא בדבר שאין העין שולטת בו, שנאמר (דברים כח:ח) יצו ה' אתך את הברכה באסמך.

When a person counts, weighs or measures their produce they preclude the possibility of a ברכה being sent to that produce. The reason the גמרא gives is that עין שולטת בו, the counting raises the specter of the הרע עין taking control over the produce, not allowing for blessings to take hold. For once a person knows the exact amount they have, inevitably a certain amount of pride seeps in; and pride is the source of הרע עין.

The pride one will take when he or she receives an exact accounting of their possessions will come without regard to how that accounting was achieved. For example, if one were to swell with pride when told how many servants they might have, it would be irrelevant whether someone counted his servants directly or indirectly. Therefore, the הרע עין problem would apply for any type of counting. This is the הרע עין that Rashi is referring to on our Pasuk when he writes, וְשֶׁהַמֶּנִּין שׁוֹלֵט בּוֹ עֵין הָרַע, Rashi concludes by saying, כְּמוֹ שֶׁמְצִינוּ בְיָמֵי דָוִד, for the counting of דוד המלך had no purpose other than to exhibit the power of his kingdom.

But, this would only be problematic if one were to count for the purpose of taking pride in one's possessions. However, this would not be problematic if one had a different purpose for counting, such as a general need to know the number of soldiers he has in his army so that he might appropriate the correct number of soldiers to a specific battle, or for purpose of a מצוה. In such cases, as long as one does not count the people or objects directly, they need not fear any negative repercussions.

If, for whatever reason, one would decide to go ahead with a pride-inducing accounting, the only way in which they could deflect a plague would be for each person to give an atonement, כּוֹפֵר נֶפֶשׁ, such as the מחצית השקל. By so doing it turns the unnecessary counting into a מצוה, removing the fear of causing pride and הרע עין¹¹.

2. As discussed in the previous note, the prohibition to count the people can be broken down into three categories: Hashem counting, man counting for a constructive purpose, and an unnecessary counting. We have proposed that the difference between the three is that Hashem's counting is done directly, counting with a purpose can only be done indirectly and counting without a purpose can only be done through the מחצית השקל.

As we have mentioned, the first Rashi in Bamidbar teaches of Hashem's love for the Jewish people which is expressed through His constant counting of בני ישראל. There are two sources in the Gemoroh which provide guidance as to the scope of the prohibition for counting בני ישראל.

The most obvious source is our Pasuk, which seems to provide a very clear directive to only count the people through the giving of a מחצית השקל lest a plague strike as a result of the census. The Gemoroh in (כב:) certainly reads the Pasuk in this fashion. The Gemoroh seeks to provide a bit of background to the story in פרק כד, שמואל ב, in which דוד המלך commands Yoav to conduct a census of בני ישראל for no apparent reason. The ensuing census causes a lethal plague. The Gemoroh explains that דוד's decision was the result of Hashem's causing דוד to forget the very basic law which forbids counting people and foretells the tragic consequences. The Gemoroh quotes our Pasuk as the source of that law. This conclusion is supported by Rashi ד"ה ולא יהיה בהם who writes: וְשֶׁהַמֶּנִּין שׁוֹלֵט בּוֹ עֵין הָרַע וְהַדָּבָר בָּא עֲלֵיהֶם, כְּמוֹ שֶׁמְצִינוּ בְיָמֵי דָוִד נגף. From this source alone we would conclude that every census must be conducted through the giving of a מחצית השקל lest a plague ensue.

A second source, however, seems to contradict this conclusion. The Gemoroh in (סב:) relates that the Kohanim were chosen daily through a type of lottery, to decide who would merit

11 Perhaps for this very reason the Torah goes out of its way to ensure that the giving of the מחצית השקל induced humility and not pride. Giving a half shekel drove home the point that each person in himself is not perfect and that everyone needs others to complete them. Also, making sure that everyone gave the exact same amount - העשיר לא - ensured no one would feel superior to his fellow.

bringing the קרבן תמיד. The lottery consisted of the Kohanim standing in a circle and lifting a finger to be counted. The Gemoroh asks why they did not count the Kohanim directly. The Gemoroh answers that this is because it is forbidden to count בני ישראל. The Gemoroh brings a proof to this from the fact that שאול counted his army (שמואל א פרק טו) through each giving a טלה as it says ויפקדם בטלאים.

The Gemoroh thus teaches:

אמר רבי יצחק: אסור למנות את ישראל אפילו לדבר מצוה.

The Gemoroh adds:

אמר רבי אלעזר: כל המונה את ישראל עובר בלאו, שנאמר (הושע ב) והיה מספר בני ישראל כחול הים אשר לא ימד¹². רב נחמן בר יצחק אמר עובר בשני לאוין שנאמר לא ימד ולא יספר.

To summarize: the Gemoroh teaches us that it is forbidden to count בני ישראל and one who does so transgresses two negative prohibitions¹³.

The above Gemoroh certainly agrees that counting is forbidden, however, it allows for indirect counting, something not mentioned in the first source. Why?

There is an additional problem. Why, when searching for a source for the counting prohibition, did the Gemoroh here not mention our Pasuk which specifically bans counting בני ישראל and even specifies the punishment? Why rely on a historical fact, which can always be understood in different ways, or on a Pasuk in Navi, and ignore the obvious prohibition stated in the Torah? What makes this particularly perplexing is the fact that the Gemoroh in ברכות considers the prohibition based on our Pasuk to be so obvious and basic that רבן יודעים של בית רבן יודעים¹⁴, even school children know of it! So, how it is possible that the Gemoroh in יומא would ignore it completely?

And, finally, why did דוד המלך not count the people indirectly as שאול had done? Even if he forgot the Halacha, certainly knowing what שאול had done should have clued him in. And, when asked to count the people, Yoav protests, most likely due to the fact that he knew of the prohibition. Now, even though דוד insisted, why did Yoav simply count indirectly? After all, דוד never told him how to count!

Using an idea developed here by the אורח חיים הקדוש we may answer that there is a difference between when Hashem counts, which may be done directly, and when man counts which may not be done directly. In addition, when man counts there is a difference between when the counting is done for a constructive purpose and when the census is senseless. The Gemoroh in יומא refers to a counting done for a reason¹⁵, as the Gemoroh says specifically, אסור למנות את ישראל אפילו לדבר מצוה. This constructive counting may, however, be done indirectly, as is seen by the counting of שאול המלך. The Gemoroh teaches us that even though he needed to count his troops, he was permitted to do so only through an indirect means since direct counting is forbidden even for a מצוה. This prohibition is learned from the Pasuk in הושע.

Our Pasuk, and the Gemoroh in ברכות, refer to a counting done for no constructive purpose. Such a counting may not be done, even indirectly. Only by giving a מחצית השקל as a כופר נפש, can a plague be averted. Thus, the Gemoroh in יומא does not bring our Pasuk, since our Pasuk refers to a non-mצוה situation, while the Gemoroh in יומא is searching for a source for a מצוה situation.

12 א ונהיה מספר בני ישראל כחול הים אשר לא ימד ולא יספר ונהיה במקום אשר יאמר לקהם לא-עמי אתם ואמר לקהם בני א-ליהי: 12

13 As we saw in the Gemoroh, the prohibitions are based on a Pasuk in הושע. We have a rule that we do not learn prohibitions from Pesukim in Novi: (מסכת חגיגה י): דברי תורה מדברי קבלה לא ילפינו (מסכת חגיגה י). Therefore, the prohibition is not regarded as binding in Halacha (as a תעשה) as in not mentioned in the Rambam or Shulchan Aruch. The purpose of the Gemoroh bringing the Pesukim in Novi was therefore not to provide a legally binding source for the prohibition but rather to provide what is known as an אסמכתא. This is a type of secondary source for an accepted practice or prohibition that has no Biblical source.

The Rambam (הלכות תמידים ומוספים פ"ד ה"ד) does however mention the prohibition as regards counting the Kohanim and regarding the prohibition to count Jews directly:

ולמה מונה המניין שהסכימו עליו על האצבעות שהוציאו ולא היה מונה על האנשים עצמן? לפי שאסור למנות ישראל אלא על ידי דבר אחר שנאמר ויפקדם בטלאים.

14 אמר ליה הקדוש ברוך הוא לדוד מסית קרית לי? הרי אני מכשילך בדבר שאפילו תינוקות של בית רבן יודעים אותו, דכתיב (שמות ל') כי תשא את ראש בני ישראל לפקדיהם ונתנו איש כפר נפשו וגו'.

15 As mentioned above, the Gemoroh was discussing counting the hands of the Kohanim to choose who would serve that day in the המקדש.

This, explains the אורח חיים הקדוש, was the mistake that דוד המלך was incited to make. He thought that he could count indirectly, as did שאול המלך, but did not realize that in his case, unnecessary counting, a מחצית השקל was required.

3. Rashi understands the word נשא here to mean when you 'receive' the sum. An example would be (שמות כג:א) לא תשא שמע שוא. In both instances the תרגום אונקלוס translates as תקבל, to receive. What is problematic is why by the counting of the Leviim, does the Torah use the word פקד:

(במדבר ג:טו) פקד את בני לוי לבית אבתם למשפחתם פל־זכר מִן־חַדָּשׁ וְנִמְעָלָה תִּפְקְדֶם

The שפתי חכמים explains that the word נשא refers to a counting that was merely received, whereas the word פקד would be used for a counting that was remembered¹⁶. Since Hashem knew that the people who were being counted were destined to die in the desert the word פקד would not be appropriate. Only by שבת לוי, who would not die in the desert, does the Torah use the term פקד. Others, such as the אורח חיים הקדש, disagree with Rashi and understand the term נשא in its usual sense, to raise.

4. Questions for further thought:

- a. The Pasuk in הושע, which teaches that it is forbidden to count בני ישראל, compares counting the people to counting the sand on the beach. Wouldn't a comparison to the stars be more appropriate¹⁷?
- b. Should one avoid reading their bank statement since it might induce pride?

16 As we know that פקד can also be used to mean remember as well as to count.

17 For a possible resolution see the Gemoroh in יומא כב:

רבי יונתן רמי: כתיב: והיה מספר בני ישראל כחול הים וכתיב אשר לא ימד ולא יספר לא קשיא: כאן בזמן שישראל עושין רצונו של מקום, כאן בזמן שאין עושין רצונו של מקום. רבי אמר משום אבא יוסי בן דוסתאי: לא קשיא כאן בידי אדם, כאן בידי שמים.