

Perceptions • Sivan II, 5785 • June 7 2025 • Issue #2099



Lift up their heads? Why not just say, “Count the people”? Because that is the goal of counting people, to say that they count, that they are special, unique, and knowing that tends to lift a person’s spirit. After all, didn’t God already know the total of the Jewish people before they were even counted? He could have just told Moshe the number to write down and we would not have been the wiser. Obviously, we are meant to learn something from the counting itself, which is to make people feel that they count.

Why were they down? They became that way ever since the incident with the golden calf, and the Divine retribution that stripped them of eternal life and the two spiritual crowns they had inherited when they said, “*We will do, and we will understand*” (*Shemos 24:7*). They knew it would be a long time until they would be returned, leaving us to live history on the level we have lived until now.

As short-lived as it was, it was a whole different level of Torah life. We had, through the giving of Torah, risen to a level of reality no one else had ever experienced, short of Adam *HaRishon* before his sin. Even the Forefathers, as great as they were, had yet to experience such a level of consciousness because it was not yet the time in history. But their descendants, as great as they weren’t, had, and it was hard to go on after without it.

Something similar happened to Shaul *HaMelech*. While he still enjoyed the right to be king of the Jewish People, he had access to a more direct and intimate relationship with God. After he failed to kill every last Amaleki and lost the *Malchus*, he lost that connection and that left him melancholy, to say the least.

Such a level of connection to God basically ended for everyone when prophecy did around 313 BCE, over two thousand years ago. Even *Ruach HaKodesh*, which many claim to have had, or others have said they have had, is a far cry from actual prophecy. It certainly inspires and directs, and it can even give one a sense of *Shechinah*,

but not like we were once able to enjoy.

In fact, if we can stop leveling criticism at the Torah world for just a few moments, we can instead be awed that anyone is living by Torah on any level today. Over three thousand years since the giving of Torah, over two thousand years without direction communication with God, and millennia of exile and persecution, should have put an end to Torah history long ago.

But it didn't. A core group of Torah Jews remain despite all the forces working against it. The casualties, spiritually and physically, have been huge and painful, but still, Torah communities have established themselves and even grown around the world, and especially in *Eretz Yisroel*, a testament to our supernatural existence.

But such a long and difficult history has, and understandably so, given rise to expressions, such as, "It is hard to be a Jew." We even question potential converts, asking why they would want to join a religion with so many demands and so few returns in this world. Other religions take the opposite approach.

Even the Talmud addresses the issue somewhat here:

Onkelos *bar* Kalonikos, the son of Titus's sister, wanted to convert to Judaism. He went and raised Titus from the grave through necromancy, and said to him: "Who is most important in that world where you are now?" Titus answered him: "The Jewish people." Onkelos asked him: "Should I then attach myself to them here in this world?" Titus said to him: "Their commandments are numerous, and you will not be able to fulfill them." (*Gittin* 56b)

Maybe Onkeles had a big advantage over the rest of us. For us, the World to Come is hearsay because we've never spoken to anyone who has gone. Onkeles got to confirm the worthiness of his sacrifice of this world for the next one, but what confirmation do we have, other than our *emunah*? Those without it have left Judaism for the obvious pleasures and breaks of this world.

But God puts leaders in every generation with the ability to uplift and motivate those with whom they have contact. God gives us people who can help us see the long-term good, and inspire us to be heroic in our devotion to a Torah way of life. And if you happen to be one of those gifted people, then realize how great a responsibility and opportunity you have in this role. There is nothing more heroic in God's eyes than inspiring others to be heroic in their adherence to Torah and *mitzvos*.

So, the *mitzvah* to count the *Levi'im* in these *parshios* and the rest of the nation in ones before these is more about making things count than counting itself. It tells us to be aware of where others are holding, and to lift their spirits if they need it. It is about feeling unique and special and helping others to do this as well. This is essen-

tial not just so we can learn Torah and perform mitzvos properly, but so that we can continue to do so until the *yetzer hara* no longer has any power to stop us.

REMINDER: I will giving a two-part series, b”H, called “The Mystery of Jewish Hyster” on Session One: Monday June 9, and Monday June 16, both at 8:30 Israel time, 1:30 EST. You can register at www.shaarnunproductions.org (Seminars). It will be recorded for those who can’t watch it live, and registrants will receive a booklet with the material.

Good *Shabbos*,
Pinchas Winston
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