

NOT EVERYTHING THAT COUNTS CAN BE COUNTED

by Rabbi Yehudah Prero

After we have completed the step of Hallel, singing the praises of Hashem, at the Seder, we move on to the final step - Nirtza. We begin Nirtza, which is composed of various songs, with a declaration and a request:

"The order of the Pesach service is now completed in accordance with its laws, with all its ordinances and statutes. Just as we were worthy to conduct this order, so too may we merit performing it in the future. Pure One, who dwells up high, raise up the congregation that is without number. Soon, lead the offshoots of that which you have planted, redeemed, to Zion, with rejoicing."

In this passage from the Hagada liturgy, we see that the nation of Israel is referred to as a "congregation . . . without number." In different places in the Torah, we find metaphorical references to the size of the nation of Israel, such as "like the stars of the heavens," or "the sands of the sea shores." Here, in the conclusion of the Seder evening, a similar expression is used in the liturgy; "the congregation that is without number."

The Divrei Chaim (Shekalim 48a) explains that there are different ways of being "without number." In Hoshea (2:1), the verse states "And the number of the people of Israel shall be as the sand of the sea, which cannot be measured nor counted." The Talmud (Yoma 22b) highlights an inconsistency in this verse: The verse starts "the number of the children of Israel shall be as the sand of the sea." (The sands of the sea are a finite quantity. They can be counted, although doing such may take a very long time.) and it is also written: "Which cannot be numbered? (which implies that the number is infinite)." This is no contradiction: Here, it speaks of the time when Israel fulfills the will of Hashem, there of the time when they do not fulfill His will."

The Divrei Chaim is troubled by the answer given by the Talmud. One would think that when the nation of Israel is listening to the word of G-d, they are, at that time, in the status of "cannot be counted." Because of the nation's adherence to the word of G-d, they merit being of great number. Conversely, when the nation of Israel does not listen to G-d, one would think the nation would not be bestowed the blessing of "not being numbered," but rather be in the "mere" status of "being as the sand of the sea." However, the Talmud says just the opposite!

In truth, counting can occur in different scenarios. A person can have a pile of money before him, and the individual counts the entire sum, so that he arrives at a total of the measure of currency before him. On the other hand, a person can have a variety of items of value before him. He can have

gold, silver, rubies, diamonds and other precious items. He can then count how many different items he has before him. When the nation of Israel is listening to the word of G-d, it is like the counting of money, the counting of grains of sand. The entire nation is united, of like heart and soul. Counting such individuals is like counting sand. The verse does not mean to imply that this number is necessarily finite. Rather, it means that a single commodity is being counted. However, when the nation does not listen to Hashem, it is like counting numerous commodities. There is no unity or togetherness, and the count is made difficult because of the large amount of different items needing counting. This is a group that "cannot be counted."

At the end of the Seder, we state how we have all just completed the Seder. All in the nation of Israel have gone through the same process of recalling the exodus from Egypt. We have all eaten our matzo and maror. We have had our four cups of wine. At this moment in time, we are a congregation, a group - but not just any congregation. We are a "congregation that is without number!" We are a congregation that, just like grains of sand on a beach, is together, of like heart and soul, united in our devotion to G-d. We ask G-d that He should lead this congregation without number out of exile, and into the rebuilt Jerusalem.

After the Seder has concluded, it is up to us to make sure that we remain a "congregation, without number," so that we can indeed see the end of our exile arrive speedily.