

# COUNT ON GOD TO SAVE THE DAY!

*by Rabbi Pinchas Winston*

Everyone is accountable in this world, apparently even Moshe Rabbeinu and the builders of the Mishkan. Not that Moshe Rabbeinu or any of the workers were suspect, but it never hurts to come clean before your fellow man as well God, especially when it comes to the spending of public funds.

This is what the Mishnah says in Meseches Shekalim, quite fitting for this week's special Maftir of Parashas Shekalim, in advance of Rosh Chodesh Adar. Just because God knows the truth about you doesn't mean that He tells everyone else about it, though if a person is scrupulous and has integrity, He will arrange events to spare a person from suspicion.

On the topic of counting, we have a tradition, interestingly enough, that blessing only comes to things that are not counted (Bava Metzia 42a). In fact, sometimes counting results in just the opposite—in curse—which is why, in Parashas Ki Sisa, the Jewish people were not counted directly but through their contributions of a half-shekel.

This is not something to be taken lightly, and it is why people in the know, when trying to ascertain if 10 people are available for a minyan, do not directly count people, but the shirts they are wearing, or by assigning one word of a 10-word verse to each person. When all the words are used up, 10 people have been counted.

Dovid HaMelech once made the mistake of taking a regular census of the people of his kingdom, and a terrible plague resulted in the end. Even today, census-taking remains controversial since they rarely take into account such traditions.

Is this mere superstition? Not according to the Zohar:

Why does a plague come because of a counting? Because blessing does not reside on something that is counted, but just the opposite, once it is counted, the blessing is removed from it. And, once the blessing is removed from it, the Sitra Achra resides on it to feed of the residue [of blessing] and is able to do damage [as a result]. Therefore, they took [the half-shekel] to transfer the counting to the coins, away from the people. (Zohar, Ki Sisa 187b)

In other words, even after the blessing has been removed some of the Divine light remains behind and attracts the reality spiritual impurity to it in the form of the Sitra Achra, which 'feeds' off it. This is like feeding a weak lion and opening the door to let him out. Will he not get stronger and do much damage once he is free? And, who bears responsibility, but the person who has done all of this?

But, why should counting make a difference to one's level of blessing? The Zohar explains this as well:

The Upper Blessing comes from the side of Chesed, and all measuring and counting is from the side of Gevurah, which is a matter of measurement and limits ... (Ibid.)

Chesed and Gevurah are the two primary forces in Creation, opposites in nature. Chesed is expansive, and Gevurah constricts. Both are essential and each has its place in life, and when each is used in the proper manner, *tikun* —rectification—is achieved. Problems arise when one is used too much, or at the wrong time.

Generosity is a function of Chesed, whereas stinginess is the result of Gevurah. Generous people happily give to others what they can to help out and do not pay attention to limits. But stingy people, if they even give to others at all, tend to pay close attention to every last thing they share. Hence, blessing, which is associated with expansiveness and a lack of limitation, is a function of Chesed, whereas counting puts a cap on blessing by strictly defining its parameters, a Gevurah-oriented trait.

Thus, to count something is to apply Gevurah to it. It is to define the thing and to limit it, and to yank it from the world of Chesed and blessing to the side of Gevurah and constriction, the domain of the *Sitra Achra*. For, the *Sitra Achra*, the source of the *yetzer hara* and evil in the world, can only exist in a reality where God's light is constricted, which happens when something is counted.

Hence the Zohar asks, if so, then how could they count the Jewish people, and answers that each person gave what is called a '*kofer Nefesh*'—literally, atonement of the soul—in the form of a half-shekel. They were then gathered together into a single container, after which they took a tally of all the coins. Hence, the Zohar explains, the counting was of coins, not people, showing that counting has its place in Jewish life as well, but should be limited to a halachically acceptable means.

The Zohar further explains that even before they counted the coins the Jewish people received a blessing to draw down the trait of Chesed to them, which gives without measure and limit. And, even after counting the coins the Jewish people were blessed again, so that even though the coins were counted, and were in place of the Jewish people, the blessing prior to the counting and after would save them from a plague.

You hear stories about how people forget to check their bank balances for extended periods of time, expecting to find less in their accounts than they actually do once they finally check them. They think that they have spent more money than they actually made, and sometimes they are even afraid to balance their check books for fear of bad news. And yet, somehow, their finances work out.

There could be a number of explanations for why this happens. For example, it could just be the result of good *mazel*. Good things do happen in life, and sometimes people find themselves in better situations than they thought they should have been. This is not something to rely upon, and it

may not happen often, but it does happen sometimes. The question is, what do we call it when it happens more often than it ought to?

It could be coincidence, for those who believe in such an idea. But, they too have difficulty answering the question when such 'coincidences' happen more times than the odds should allow them to.

The Zohar is calling it brochah, blessing from the side of Chesed. But how exactly does it work? Does a bank teller make a mistake and deposit someone else's money into the person's account? If that were the case, the person would have to return the money. Does the teller make a mistake in such a way that no one notices it and therefore, the money doesn't have to be returned? Perhaps.

Maybe God just makes new money suddenly appear? That's also a possibility, and just one of many that we might or might not imagine.

The point is that the 'how' matters not. What matters is that God runs the world and everything belongs to Him, and He takes from people who do not deserve and gives to people who do. He can hide information from people who might otherwise have known it, and reveal it to those who might otherwise have overlooked it. Whatever it takes to set things straight, to give blessing to the blessed and to constrict it for those who do not deserve, He can and does do it.

It can happen in a number of ways. There have been times when more money comes in than I had expected, and times when bills were lower than I thought they should be. Not too long ago, my electrical bill was about 300 shekels less than it has been in the longest time, when I thought that it would be higher than normal because of air conditioner use (it was a long, hot summer this year). I can't explain it and I am not even going to try.

It works that way with time as well. I have found that at times I have been late for shul, not necessarily due to any fault of my own, most of my minyan came late that day as well. They usually come early or on time, but the one time I came late, so did they. It was as if we were all affected by the same late 'spirit.'

Once, on a speaking trip, I had two hours to get from St. Louis to Pittsburgh, get picked up, and taken to a lecture that I had that night. Booking speaking trips in multiple cities is never an easy task, given airline schedules and availability, and sometimes it comes down to minutes. But rarely was I ever a victim of a double booking until that particular day and flight.

Though I got to the airport early, as I usually do (and this was before 9-11), I thought that it was strange that they would not issue my boarding pass until I got to the gate. Having never been bumped before, I didn't suspect that it was about to happen to me that day. Until, that is, I got to the gate and later found out that at least 15 of us were 'extra' on the flight.

I politely explained my circumstance to the steward but to no avail. "Everyone has a reason to get to Pittsburgh on time," he told me. There were apologies, but no sympathy, and I was told to sit and

wait and listen for my name to be called. All I could do, as my stomach churned from nervousness and anticipation of having to cancel my next speaking engagement at the last minute, was take out my Tehillim and recite a few chapters as a request for Divine assistance.

Shortly after, there was an announcement explaining the error, followed by another apology, and then the proposed solution. They were going to call out names in Alphabetical order as seats became available, and anyone not called by the time the door closed to the aircraft would have to take a later flight.

With a last name like, 'Winston,' my hopes of getting on the flight were quickly dashed, but I said more Tehillim just the same.

The gap in-between names that were called always made it seem as if the previous person had indeed been the last person. But somehow, they always called another. However, with each person they called, the chances of my getting on the flight lessened, as less seats remained available on what was supposedly a fully-booked flight.

I don't even remember what happened exactly. All I know was that at some point very close to departure time, my name was called, the last one for that flight. When I stepped onto the plane, a little out of breath, they closed the door right after me and asked me to quickly take my seat. In all of the rush and distraction I had even noticed which seat they had given to me, just so happy and relieved to be on the plane and on my way.

However, after being shown to my seat, which took but a moment, I was pleasantly surprised to find out that I had been given a business class seat, the only seat to have been left open on a crowded flight. Apparently some businessman had not made it, and I was upgraded, at no extra charge, to his seat.

Everybody has stories like that, many far more intricate than mine. In the secular world, they are called coincidences. In the Torah world, they are called Hashgochah Pratis. In the realm of Kabbalah, they are examples of unrestricted blessing, the opposite of tzimtzum, of constriction. Our job is to give God the means to bless us, but we always have to give Him some 'room' as well to do His magic, or rather, His miracles.

Sometimes, by not going to far to count something, we can further count on Him to save our day. As we conclude this week's reading with the recounting of the Jewish people in the desert, in advance of a holiday—Purim—that such Divine blessing saved the day, it is a message to take to heart and to live by on a daily basis.

Chazak!

---

Text

Copyright © by [Rabbi Pinchas Winston](#) and Project Genesis, Inc.

Rabbi Winston has authored many books on Jewish philosophy (Hashkofa). If you enjoy Rabbi Winston's Perceptions on the Parsha, you may enjoy his books. Visit Rabbi Winston's [online book store](#) for more details! [www.thirtysix.org](http://www.thirtysix.org)