

# DO NOT COUNT YOUR BLESSINGS

by Rabbi Yochanan Zweig

*"...which were counted at the word of Moshe..." (38:21)* The Midrash quotes a verse from Mishlei: - "ish emunos verav berachos". This means, "Due to the trustworthy man, comes an abundance of blessing."<sup>1</sup> The Midrash interprets this verse as a reference to Moshe who, because of his unequalled integrity, was appointed as the treasurer responsible for the accounting of funds collected to build the Mishkan.<sup>2</sup> The Midrash cites the verse, - "bechol baisi ne'emon hu", which means, "In My entire house is he trustworthy"<sup>3</sup> as a support. Why does trustworthiness result in an abundance of blessing? Furthermore, how can the verse "bechol baisi ne'emon" be cited to ascertain Moshe's financial integrity, when this verse is referring to the uniqueness of Moshe's prophecy, and not his financial trustworthiness? Finally, why is Moshe the only one who is trustworthy for this position? The Talmud states that blessing only rests on that which is hidden from the eye. Once something has been counted, its potential for blessing is lost.<sup>4</sup> The Zohar questions why the accounting of funds does not violate this Talmudic dictum. The Zohar answers that since it is for a holy purpose, counting is permitted, as we see in the case of the tithing of animals.<sup>5</sup> Why does something have to remain hidden to receive blessing, and why does this not apply if the counting is for a holy purpose? The Talmud teaches that if a person finds an object without identifying markings, he is not permitted to keep it, unless he knows that enough time has elapsed for the person who lost the object to realize that it is missing. If, however, a person finds money, he is permitted to keep it, for he can be certain that the owner realizes that it is missing, "since a person consistently checks his pockets to see that his money is still there".<sup>6</sup> What is the psychological insight that the Talmud is teaching us regarding the nature of a person? Inherent in man's nature is an insecurity regarding his possessions, which manifests itself in the need to feel ownership over all his possessions whenever possible. Constantly touching his wallet is an example of man's need to feel connected to his possessions. In order to cater to this need with things he cannot constantly touch, man will view them whenever possible. For those assets which are intangible, such as stocks or bonds, man continuously counts them. Counting gives a person a strong sense of ownership. The word "beracha" is derived from the word "beraicha" - a reservoir or source, for blessing means a connection to the source of existence, i.e. Hashem. If something is connected to its source, it flourishes and grows abundantly. When man asserts his dominance over an item, he separates it from its source, and the beracha is lost. Therefore, blessing can only rest on that which is hidden, that which man has not counted. When counting for Hashem's sake, the opposite is true; the very act of counting connects the item back to

Hashem. A problem arises when man collects or counts funds, even if it be for Hashem, and he begins to feel a sense of ownership or connection to those funds. Moshe was so closely connected to Hashem, that Hashem Himself attests to his unique level of prophecy as if Moshe is in Hashem's house. Therefore, Moshe was best suited to be the treasurer responsible for collecting and counting Bnei Yisroel's donations to the Mishkan, for his actions directly connected back to Hashem. This is the explanation of the verse, "Due to the trustworthy man, comes an abundance of blessing." 1.28:4 2.Tanchuma Pekudei 3 3.Bamidbar 12:7 4.Taanis 8b 5.Parshas Pekudei 6.Baba Metzia 21b

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## A Non-Checking Account

*"These are the accountings of the Mishkan of the Testimony, which were counted at the word of Moshe..." (38:21)* The Ibn Ezra cites a difficulty posed by Rav Sadiah Gaon: The Torah gives an account of what was done with the silver and copper donated for the construction of the Mishkan and its vessels, but no such account is given in reference to the gold collected.<sup>1</sup> Perhaps the solution lies in understanding a statement by the Daas Zekainim in Parshas Terumah. The Torah lists gold, silver, and copper as the three metals donated for the construction of the Mishkan. The Daas Zekainim comments that these three alloys represent three levels of charitable donations. Gold represents the donations of a healthy individual, silver represents the contributions of someone who is ill, and copper represents the donations of someone who has already passed on.<sup>2</sup> When making a charitable donation, there are two factors to be considered: the impact on the individual giving up his resources and the return on his investment, i.e. what he hopes to get in return. A person who donates after death bears no loss in his giving but hopes to accumulate merit to protect him in the next world. This is the lowest level of donating, and is represented by the giving of copper. Someone whose giving is spurred by illness bears a loss of resources, but hopes to see a return on his investment, i.e. regaining his health. This is the middle level, the giving of silver. A person who has his health yet donates, bears a loss of funds and gives without ulterior motives. This is the highest level of donating, the giving of gold. People generally tend to attribute to others the very faults they themselves possess. The Talmud refers to this behavior as "kol haposeil bemumo poseil" - "One who finds deficiencies in another is transposing his own deficiencies upon that person."<sup>3</sup> If a person gives with ulterior motives, he will ask for an account of how his donation was spent. Since he cannot give altruistically, he assumes that the person collecting from him has a personal agenda as well. Therefore, he requires a complete account of how the donation was allocated. The Torah gives a complete account of the silver and copper donations, for it was for these donations that the donor required a complete account. However, since the gold donor's giving was completely altruistic, he had no doubt that the treasurer's motives were just as pure. Therefore, an account was not necessary. 1.38:26 2.25:3 3.Kiddushin 70b

