

The Rebbe's Discourses

Summaries of points from the Rebbe's Chassidic Discourses בלי אחריות כלל וכלל

פרשת שקלים ד"ה כי תשא תשכ"ז בלתי מוגה

Published for Shabbat Sedra Vayakhel, Parshat Shekalim

29 Adar 1 5784, 9 March 2024¹

COUNTING

ON SHABBAT OF PARSHAT SHEKALIM THE BEGINNING OF SEDRA KI TISA IS READ FROM a second Torah Scroll. The passage is about the counting of the Jewish people. Each adult male gave half a shekel, and thus their total number was known. The key words, **Ki Tisa**, can be translated as 'when you count' and also as 'when you elevate, lift up'. These two meanings are seemingly opposite. 'Counting' means that the things being counted are finite, defined, and they remain the same before counting and after counting. By contrast, 'elevation' means raising things to a higher level. Through elevation they can be changed or utterly transformed.

A further problem is that in Jewish life, counting can be seen in a negative way. Indeed, that is why instead of being counted directly, this passage in the Torah instructs Moses to tell each person to give a half-shekel, and by counting the sum of money raised, the number of people can be calculated. But even knowing the number might be a problem, as the author of the *Shelah*² asks: surely, 'a blessing is only found in something which is hidden'³, something of which its number is not known!

The Maamar explains that there are two kinds of numbering: of this world, which is negative, and of *Olam HaBa*, the World to Come, which is positive. The counting of the Jewish people was of the World to Come, which is positive.

¹ Maamar Ki Tisa Parshat Shekalim 5727 (1967). It was printed in *Dvar Malchut Pekudei* 5774. It was not edited by the Rebbe.

² Rabbi Isaiah Halevy Horowitz (c.1600), author of the *Shnei Luchot Habrit* (Two Tablets of the Covenant), termed by its acronym *Shelah*. He was the Rabbi of Frankfurt am Main. In the *Shelah* see Bemidbar, 347a.

³ See Taanit 8b, Bava Metzia 42a.

The Talmud (Beitza 3b) also describes two kinds of counting: things which are always counted one by one, *et shedarko limnot*⁴, which are therefore considered very significant; and things which are sometimes counted but sometimes are just sold in bulk, *kol shedarko limnot*⁵.

The key words are *et* and *kol*. The Hebrew word *et* is the sign of the direct object, with no direct English equivalent. It signifies selflessness, *bitul*. Things in this category are in a state of *bitul* and are therefore like the spiritual counting of *Olam HaBa*. But the word *kol*, although it has positive connotations, signifying the Sefirah Yesod, joining heaven and earth (which will be explained below), also expresses a chain of levels descending to evil as seen in the words from the liturgy of the daily Morning Service: 'G-d forms light and creates darkness, makes peace and creates 'everything', *kol*'. This adapts a verse in Isaiah (45:7) which ends 'creates *evil*'. Thus the word *kol* can include evil. Hence *kol* is the counting of This World, potentially negative and dangerous.

However, there is another way to understand the force of the word *kol*. This word is understood in Chassidic teachings as meaning the Sefirah Yesod (Foundation). A biblical verse⁶ includes the phrase 'for *kol* Heaven and Earth', which is translated by the Aramaic Targum as 'joining Heaven and Earth'. Thus the word *kol* 'joins' Heaven and Earth, the higher and the lower dimensions, which is the function of the Sefirah Yesod, joining the higher 'male' Sefirot with the 'female' Malchut, Kingship.

Further, the Sefirah Yesod represents Joseph⁷. A famous teaching of the Sages is that the evil eye does not affect the seed of Joseph, based on the verse 'and he will increase like fish' (Vayechi 48:16). This means that Yesod has two states. If it simply descends below, it has the negative aspect of counting, subject to the danger of the evil eye. But if it is connected to G-d above, as in the passage from the Morning Service, 'joining heaven and earth'⁸, which means being bonded to the Divine, it is elevated and is beyond danger.

The seed of Joseph can thus be seen to have two qualities. On the one hand they are like fish, nullified in the sea, representing the sacred hidden realm. At this

⁴ Meaning 'that which is [always] counted'.

⁵ Meaning 'anything which might be counted'.

⁶ I Chron. 29:11. This is part of the liturgy in the Morning Service, in the passage *Vayevarech David*, 'And David blessed..'

⁷ Chassidic teachings link the Patriarchs Abraham, Isaac and Jacob with the three Sefirot Kindness, Severity, and Mercy. Joseph relates to Yesod, Foundation and David to Kingship.

⁸ As mentioned above, this passage from I Chron. 29:11 is translated by the Targum as 'unifying heaven and earth'. 'Unifying' is expressed by the word *de-achid*, signifying being connected to Yachid, the essence of the Divine.

level they express *et*, selflessness and sanctity. On the other hand they descend down, down into the revealed realms, which can include evil, but there too they preserve their sense of connection with the One. Thus they also signify *kol* which has been elevated.

Now we can understand the counting of the Jewish people. They too express both aspects: *et* and *kol*. They are counted, through giving the half-shekalim, which is a form of giving Tzedaka. The counting is not dangerous, but in fact uplifts them, as in the words Ki Tisa, which can be translated both as counting and raising up. This is because the Tzedaka has the power to lift them.

The Jewish people share the quality of the Hidden Realm, signified by their having passed through the Splitting of the Sea, and the Revealed Realm of this world. They can carry the highest spirituality into the lowest realms of This World by virtue of the Tzedaka they give, including the spiritual Tzedaka of spreading the Wellsprings of Chassidic teachings to the outside.

The Shelah spoke of the two different kinds of counting, that of The World to Come and that of This World. But the counting of the Jewish people through the half-shekalim in fact joins the World to Come and This World, as will particularly be revealed with the coming of Moshiach, with the true Redemption.

Torah teachings are holy – please treat these pages with care