

# What Counts

PARSHA INSIGHTS - BAMIDBAR (5757)

## A MINDSET FOR SHAVUOS - The REAL Reason for Doing Mitzvos

In the beginning of the *parsha* [Torah portion], Moshe is told to take a count of *Bnai Yisroel* [the Children of Israel]. The Torah relates that he and Aharon performed the task properly. In *Perek Alef, Pasuk Yud Tes* [chapter 1, verse 19], it says, "...just like Hashem commanded Moshe; he counted them in the *Midbar Sinai* " [Wilderness of Sinai].

In the *Darash Moshe*, Rav Moshe Feinstein wonders about the need for this phrase. Since it says that G-d required Moshe to count the Jews, and then the Torah narrates to us that he counted them, it seems obvious that he did this BECAUSE G-d had told him to do so! Why must we be told that he did it "just like Hashem commanded Moshe"?

Rav Moshe answers with a theme, which he favors in his writings. Kings usually count their army personnel in order to know how powerful their kingdoms are. Heads of nations always want to be aware of how protected they are from aggression. We might have thought that THIS was the motive Moshe had in mind when he took a census of the Jews - he was our supreme leader, and he felt responsible to know our power against potential foes. We also would have assumed that Moshe waited for G-d to tell him to do this ONLY because he would do nothing without a prior directive from G-d. He accepted G-d's ruling to count *Bnai Yisroel*, and his rationale for doing so was like we stated above, to know the count of our fighting force, the men twenty years and older, so we could be prepared for military encounters with our adversaries.

To prevent us from reaching this mistaken conclusion regarding Moshe's *kavana* [intention] in counting *Bnai Yisroel*, the Torah says "**just like Hashem commanded Moshe**, he counted them..." Moshe counted the Jews after Hashem had told him to do so. What was in Moshe's mind while he fulfilled this mission? It was simply to do what G-d had told him to do. Moshe was not thinking that this census was necessary for protection from enemies, like it is with other nations. The *Bnai Yisroel* have needs which are different from other nations. We have firm *bitachon* [trust] in Hashem, Who is capable of fighting our wars for us even in the absence of great armies. Jewish history proves this without us having to confirm it; look at Jewish military victories from the times of *Tanach* all the way into our century. As Yonasan Ben Shaul told his weapon bearer, "Nothing prevents Hashem from saving, whether with many (soldiers) or with few..." (*Shmuel Alef [Samuel I] 14:6*). So, what DID Moshe have in mind while counting the Jewish people? It is a decree, an edict from Hashem to do this - **that** is why I am doing it. Rav Moshe concludes that this lesson applies to all actions and *mitzvos* [good deeds] we perform. Ideally, they should be done with this pure intention.

In another place, Rav Moshe develops this same theme from a different angle. We thus far established that the reason **Moshe** did *mitzvos* was that he had been told to do so. So to, **we** are supposed to do *mitzvos* because Hashem told Moshe that the *mitzvos* need to be performed. Even in the presence of logical, philosophical explanations and motives, our true purpose in doing G-d's Will is that it is G-d's Will, which was communicated to Moshe in the Torah. Where is there proof for this, brought out by Rav Moshe Feinstein himself?

In Hashem's introductory comments to *Matan Torah* [the giving of the Torah] (the marvelous event we are to experience and celebrate this week, *b'ezras* [with the help of] Hashem), He tells Moshe that *Bnai Yisroel* will believe in Moshe and all upcoming prophets forever. "...and also in you they will believe forever..." (*Parshas Yisro, Perek Yud Tes, Pasuk Tes* [19:9]). This belief in Moshe, mentioned by Hashem right before *Matan Torah*, is the affirmation that *Bnai Yisroel* will fulfill the *mitzvos* of the Torah for one reason only - **because Hashem transmitted the Torah to Moshe, and Moshe Rabainu [Moses our teacher] gave it over to us.**

In fact, says Rav Moshe, gentiles who observe the seven *mitzvos* of *Bnai Noach* [non-Jews who follow the 7 laws of Noah] must keep them for this very same reason. Their motive is supposed to be that since these seven *mitzvos*, which govern all humankind, were given over to Moshe in the Torah (and he was told that the nations of the world must keep them), they must be observed. This is stated clearly in the *Rambam Hilchos Melachim 8:11*. What is the reason to demand so much from them? It is very simple to comprehend. If someone observes a *mitzvah* because it is logical to do so or because this is his family tradition, it is not considered that he is

OBSERVING or FULFILLING a *mitzvah* [commandment]. Rather, he is doing what logic and family customs dictate. True, he deserves credit; he has promoted peace and morality in his family, community, and society. However, he has definitely not reached the epitome of *mitzvah* fulfillment.

Rav Moshe continues to open our eyes by explaining the *Rambam's* rule that a non-Jew must fulfill the seven *mitzvos* because this is what was given to Moshe in the Torah at Sinai. Great philosophers such as Aristotle and Plato, who were definitely "*chachmai umos ha'olam*" [outstanding scholars], don't deserve the title "*chasidai umos ha'olam*" [pious people]. This is true, even though they DID fulfill the seven *mitzvos* of *Bnai Noach*, because their motive was not to observe what was given to Moshe in the Torah. In fact, they did not even believe in the Revelation at Sinai. They only kept these precepts because it seemed logically sound to do so.

The concluding statement of the *Darash Moshe* is most relevant to us. If this is the case by gentiles, that THEY must keep their *mitzvos* only because it is stated thus in the Torah of the Jewish people, all the more so WE must do likewise! In other words, our whole incentive in *shmiras mitzvos* [observance of the commandments] should be to meticulously accomplish G-d's will in the world, **because Moshe was taught this in the Torah on Sinai**. This even applies to *mitzvos*, which are extremely easy for human logic to fathom, such as faith in the existence of G-d. In the first of the *Aseres Hadibros* [Ten Commandments or "Utterances"], we learn to believe that Hashem exists and is involved in our lives. The reason we are to believe this is because we have received this *mitzvah* of *emunah* [faith] from Moshe *Rabainu* (besides the fact that all of *Bnai Yisroel* heard the *dibros* [utterances], at least the first two, clearly), who transmitted the Torah to his generation and their children in the *midbar* [wilderness]. This *mesorah* [tradition] remains unbroken even to this very day. THAT is why we perform the *mitzvos*. Yes, philosophy easily proves the existence of G-d. But philosophical evidence and analytical research are NOT supposed to be our motivations for doing *mitzvos*. If so, asks Rav Moshe, why did so many *gedolim* [great Torah sages] write *sefarim* [books] and monumental works on philosophy, seeking to prove beyond a doubt that Hashem exists? The answer: These books are only to HELP people - to assist them in arriving at firm belief in G-d. The real intention in believing in Hashem and doing all the *mitzvos* is because the Torah says so.

In short, Moshe himself performed all the precepts of the Torah solely because Hashem had told him to do so. This is clearly indicated by our *pasuk* in *Bamidbar* [Numbers]. The lesson has been imparted to us as well, based on G-d's statement before *Matan Torah*, in *Yisro*. May we be *zocheh* [meritorious] to a personal and communal *Kabolas Hatorah* [receiving the Torah] every day, and may this come true especially on the *Yom Tov* of *Shavuot* [Holiday of Weeks (receiving the Torah at Mount Sinai)].

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