

Parashat Ki Tavo: Forever Concealed

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Devarim 28:8

יֵצֵו יְהוָה אֶתְּךָ אֶת־הַבְּרָכָה בְּאֶסְמֶיךָ וּבְכָל מַשְׁלַח יָדְךָ
וּבְרַכְךָ בְּאֶרֶץ אֲשֶׁר־יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ נִתֵּן לָךְ:

God will ordain blessings for you upon your barns and all your undertakings: you will be blessed in the land that your God is giving you.

1. Counting the Concealed

Bavli Bava Metzia 42a

יְאָמַר רַבִּי יִצְחָק: אֵין הַבְּרָכָה מְצוּיָה אֲלָא בְּדָבָר הַסְמוּי
מִן הָעֵין, שְׁנָאֲמַר: "יֵצֵו ה' אֶתְּךָ אֶת הַבְּרָכָה בְּאֶסְמֶיךָ".
תָּנָא דְּבִי רַבִּי יִשְׁמַעֲלִי: אֵין הַבְּרָכָה מְצוּיָה אֲלָא בְּדָבָר
שְׂאִין הָעֵין שׁוֹלֶטֶת בּוֹ, שְׁנָאֲמַר: "יֵצֵו ה' אֶתְּךָ אֶת
הַבְּרָכָה בְּאֶסְמֶיךָ".

And Rabbi Yitzhak says: Blessing is found only in a matter concealed from the eye, as it is stated: "The Lord will command blessing with you in your storehouses" (Deuteronomy 28:8), where the grain is concealed. **The school of Rabbi Yishmael taught: Blessing is found only in a matter over which the eye has no dominion, as it is stated: "The Lord will command blessing with you in your storehouses."**

Bavli Taanit 8b

יְאָמַר רַבִּי יִצְחָק: אֵין הַבְּרָכָה מְצוּיָה אֲלָא בְּדָבָר הַסְמוּי
מִן הָעֵין, שְׁנָאֲמַר: "יֵצֵו ה' אֶתְּךָ אֶת הַבְּרָכָה בְּאֶסְמֶיךָ".
תָּנָא דְּבִי רַבִּי יִשְׁמַעֲלִי: אֵין הַבְּרָכָה מְצוּיָה אֲלָא בְּדָבָר
שְׂאִין הָעֵין שׁוֹלֶטֶת בּוֹ, שְׁנָאֲמַר: "יֵצֵו ה' אֶתְּךָ אֶת
הַבְּרָכָה בְּאֶסְמֶיךָ".

And apropos blessings, Rabbi Yitzhak said: A blessing is found only in an object that is hidden [samui] from the eye, not in an item visible to all, as public miracles are exceedingly rare. As it is stated: "The Lord will command His blessing upon you in your barns [ba'asamekha]" (Deuteronomy 28:8). Rabbi Yitzhak's exposition is based on the linguistic similarity between *samui* and *asamekha*. Likewise, **the school of Rabbi Yishmael taught: A blessing is found only in an object that is not exposed to the eye, as it is stated: "The Lord will command His blessing upon you in your barns."**

Ein Yaakov on Bavli Taanit 1:35

מִדָּד וְאַחֵר כִּךְ בִּירַךְ הָרִי זֹו תַּפְלַת שׁוֹא לִפִּי שְׂאִין
הַבְּרָכָה מְצוּיָה לֹא בְּדָבָר הַשְׁקוּל וְלֹא בְּדָבָר הַמְּדוּד
(חֻלּוּין פֶּרֶק כ"ה וַע"ש מִהַרש"א) וְלֹא בְּדָבָר הַמְּנוּי אֲלָא
בְּדָבָר הַסְמוּי מִן הָעֵין.

If, however, he prayed after measuring, his prayer is in vain, because [heavenly] blessing is not frequent on things which are weighed, measured or counted, but on things which are hidden from the eyesight; as it is said: The Lord will command upon thee the blessing in they storehouses [where the exact quantity is unknown]."

¹ All translations are from Sefaria, unless otherwise noted.

2. Should We Count?

II Shmuel 24:1-16	
(א) וַיִּסַּף אֶף־יְהוָה לַחֲרוֹת בְּיִשְׂרָאֵל וַיִּסֶּת אֶת־דָּוִד בֵּהֶם לֵאמֹר לֶךְ מְנֶה אֶת־יִשְׂרָאֵל וְאֶת־יְהוּדָה... (י) וַיָּהּ לִבְדֹּד אֹתוֹ אַחֲרֵי־כֵן סָפַר אֶת־הָעָם (ס) וַיֹּאמֶר דָּוִד אֶל־יְהוָה חָטָאתִי מְאֹד אֲשֶׁר עָשִׂיתִי וְעַתָּה יְהוָה הַעֲבֵר־נָא אֶת־עֲוֹן עַבְדְּךָ כִּי נִסְכַּלְתִּי מְאֹד:	(1) The anger of the LORD again flared up against Israel; and He incited David against them, saying, "Go and number Israel and Judah"... (10) But afterward David reproached himself for having numbered the people. And David said to the LORD, "I have sinned grievously in what I have done. Please, O LORD, remit the guilt of Your servant, for I have acted foolishly."
Rabbi Adin Steinsaltz on II Shmuel 24:10	
David's heart tormented him with pain and remorse after he had counted the people. David said to the Lord: I have sinned greatly in what I have done. Now, Lord, please overlook the iniquity of Your servant, for I have been very foolish. I have acted foolishly by taking an unnecessary census, which was merely an expression of pretention.	
Mishneh Torah, Hilkhoh T'midim U'Musafim 4:4	
וְלִמָּה מוֹנֶה הַמִּנִּין שֶׁהִסְכִּימוּ עָלָיו עַל הָאֲצָבָעוֹת שֶׁהוֹצִיאוּ וְלֹא הָיָה מוֹנֶה עַל הָאֲנָשִׁים עֲצָמָן לְפִי שְׂאִסוֹר לְמִנּוֹת יִשְׂרָאֵל אֲלֵא עַל יְדֵי דָבָר אֲחֵר שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר (שְׁמוּאֵל א טו ד) "וַיִּפְקְדֵם בְּטֹלָאִים":	Why do they count the number they have agreed upon by the fingers they stuck out instead of counting the people themselves? Because it is forbidden to count Jews except via another entity, as [I Samuel 15:4] states: "And he counted them with lambs."
Professor Jacob Milgrom, <i>JPS Torah Commentary: Numbers</i> , 31:48-52	
The basis for the taboo against a census is not known, although one plausible suggestion has been offered: As the shepherd counts his sheep, so the counter of persons must be their owner, a title belonging solely to God and not to man.	

3. Forever Concealed

Midrash Bemidbar Rabbah 4:2	
כָּךְ כְּבִיכּוֹל אָמַר הַקָּדוֹשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא, לְאֻמוֹת הָעוֹלָם לֹא נִתְּנִי מִנִּין, לָמָּה, שְׂאִין חֲשׁוּבִין לְפָנַי כְּלוּם, שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר (ישעיה מ, יז): כָּל הַגּוֹיִם כְּאִין נִגְדּוּ. אָבָל אַתֶּם בְּנֵי, שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר (שִׁיר הַשִּׁירִים מו, ג): הָעַמִּים מִנִּי בְטֵן וְגו', לִכְךָ מוֹנֶה אֶתְכֶם בְּכָל שָׁעָה...	So, as it were, the Holy One blessed be He said: For the nations of the world, I did not provide a census. Why? It is because they are of no significance to Me, as it is stated: "All the nations are as nothing before Him" (Isaiah 40:17). But you are My children, as it is stated: "Who have been carried from birth..." (Isaiah 46:3). That is why He counts them every moment...
Hosea 2:1	
וְהָיָה מִסְפַּר בְּנֵי־יִשְׂרָאֵל כְּחוֹל הַיָּם אֲשֶׁר לֹא־יִמָּד וְלֹא יִסָּפֵר וְהָיָה בְּמִקְוֵם אֲשֶׁר־יֹאמַר לָהֶם לֹא־עַמִּי אַתֶּם יֹאמַר לָהֶם בְּנֵי־אֱלֹהִים:	The number of the people of Israel shall be like that of the sands of the sea, which cannot be measured or counted; and instead of being told, "You are Not-My-People," they shall be called Children-of-the-Living-God.
Antoine de Saint-Exupéry, <i>The Little Prince</i>	
It is only with the heart that one can see rightly; what is essential is invisible to the eye.	