

There's More Than
One Way To Be Jewish



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Naso

Rabbi Jacob Chinitz
Jerusalem, Israel

Naso Et Rosh Bnei Gershon. We continue the count begun with Bemidbar, which is called Chomesh Hapekudim, the Chumash of the Counting. Both as Torah Jews and as democrats we have a great problem with this counting. The Torah begins with one man. We are told one man is equal to the whole world. In Devarim God tells us: *Lo Merubkhem Mikol Haamim.*

I choose you not because you are the most numerous among the peoples. A lot of the Torah is addressed to the Individual, with the singular form of the verb, noun, being used, as in *Veahavto*, You shall love. *Lereiackho*, your fellow.

Ish Ki Yakriv. If one individual brings an offering. *Ki Yikach Ish Isha*, if one man marries one woman.

Democracy too says that each individual person is a value. The State exists to serve the Individual.

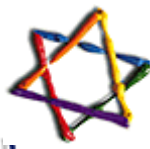
Both Religion and Democracy teach that Quality counts for more than Quantity.

And yet both Torah, and the democratic state, engage in counting people. They take the census. Both Torah and Democracy feel uncomfortable about this quantification of human life. A plague follows David's counting of the people. The census in *Ki Tissa* in *Shemot* and in *Bemidbar* supposedly is done through the Half Shekel, so that the actual count is not of human beings but of Half Shekels. Or perhaps the counting is accompanied by a constructive act, providing funds for the Sanctuary.

Democracies say they count in order to provide social services, plan for the welfare of the society, and so on.

But it goes deeper. God promises Abraham lots of descendants, as numerous as the grains of sand and the stars in the sky. *Kein Yirbu* we wish each other when we talk about grandchildren. The United States is proud of growing from 3 million two hundred years ago, to almost 300 million today. Israel is proud of growing from 600,000 in 1948 to six million today. We talk

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about the demographic battle with the Arabs. Democracy and Torah follow majority rule. *Acharei Rabim Lehatot.*

In the Halakhah we see this tension between the Individual and the Group, between Quality and Quantity, break out into some real quandaries, conundrums and even morally scandalous situations and decisions.

Rambam, Hilkhhot Rotzeach, 1.1

He who causes the loss of one life it is as if he destroyed the whole world. He who sustains one life it is as if he sustained the whole world.

2.8: He who kills the structurally altered in a fatal way, even though he eats and drinks and walks, is exempt from the charge of murder, as far as human administration is concerned...If the physicians say that his wound has no cure, and he will die from it...

So while one life is equal to all life, if the life is terminally ill, the law changes. Quantity or Quality?

2.10: If one kills a Jew or a Canaanite slave, he is executed for it. Even a slave is qualitatively enough of a victim to hold the murderer guilty.

Yesodei Hatorah, 5.5: If women are told by the enemy, give us one of you or we will attack all of you, they are all to be attacked rather than give one up voluntarily. If they say give us one or we will kill all of you, they must all be killed rather than surrender one.

It is not permitted to give up one individual to save the group. Here quality wins over quantity. The individual is not sacrificed to save the group.

I once read about a book that concocted deliberately such extreme cases of moral dilemma. One case was this: If we could save the world, or cure a disease, or wipe out poverty, or bring Utopia, by subjecting one individual to torture, or death, would it be moral on the basis of Jeremy Bentham's formula of the Greatest Good for the Greatest Number? I think on the basis of the Halakha we quoted the answer would be No.

And yet in both Torah and Democracy, when war comes, it is different. We sacrifice one soldier, or many, in order to save the many more in the nation as

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a whole. Look at the so-called "Collateral Damage" accepted by the United States, in killing not only its own, but civilians among the enemy, not because they were guilty, but because the goal justified the action. This is where Quantity wins over Quality. Who is to measure these Quantities and Qualities? How many civilians may be killed, to save how many other civilians, or your own soldiers?

The Nazis experimented on live human beings. Universities are now using the records of those experiments. One argument is: no matter how this information was obtained, we must save lives by using it. I argue: if evidence obtained by the police without a search warrant is not usable in court, against the guilty, because it is tainted, and we must prevent such practices in the future, why should this medical information obtained by torturing human beings, also be called tainted, in order to deter such evil science in the future?

Obviously the Torah values numbers. Private prayer is acceptable but prayer with a minyan is better. Count the people, but not directly, but by saying not one, not two, or by using the verse which has ten words in it. *Hoshia Et Amekho Uvorekh Et Nachalotekha Ureeim Venaseim Ad Haolom.* Numbers count. The Shekhina does not rest upon less than 600,000.

But the Individual counts, as a whole world, all by himself.

It is a puzzlement. God must know the answer since He was not satisfied with one Man. *Berov Am Hadrat Melekh.* The majesty of the King is enhanced by the large hosts. Amen.