



# A Taste of Torah Counting Up

By: Rabbi Akiva Stern

A septillion. That's a number comprised of a 1 with twenty-four zeroes following it. In a recent scientific paper published, it was estimated that there are more than a septillion stars in the observable universe. Scientists readily admit that there could be much, much more. Our galaxy alone has roughly 200 billion stars. There are an estimated 100-200 billion in other galaxies. If one were to count just the stars in our galaxy (an infinitely small percent of all stars) at the rate of one per second it would take 6,341 years!!

Our forefather Avraham was told by G-d that his children, the Jewish Nation, would be as plentiful as the stars and would be too numerous to count. The Talmud (Yoma 22b) discusses the verse in this week's Torah portion which gives the total number of the Jewish People after a census was taken. The Talmud asks, doesn't this verse seem incongruous with the idea found in the Torah that the Jewish People can't be (and indeed should not be) counted? The Talmud gives a cryptic response: When the Jewish People do the will of G-d, then they are too numerous to count, but when they do not, they can, in fact, be counted. What can this mean? What correlation is there to be found between their actions and their size?

The Dubno Maggid (Rabbi Yaakov Kranz; 1740-1804) explains this passage with a parable:

Two children were arguing with one another. Each claimed that his father was far wealthier than the other's. The first child, whose father ran a large chain of vending machines, spoke proudly of tall piles of burlap sacks brimming with bright jingling change waiting to be brought to the bank. The second child, whose father was an affluent investment banker, snorted derisively and explained that each and every one of the many banker's notes his father carried in wads in his money pouch was worth far more than all the sacks of coins combined!

The Dubno Maggid explains that each and every Jew has the ability to be as valuable as he chooses. When a Jew chooses to live a life divorced from spirituality, he is but one simple man easily counted and dismissed. But if he chooses to fulfill the will of G-d, he thereby attaches himself to the infinite. By dint of the fact that he is connected to G-d, his inherent value becomes immeasurably large. While one can still technically count the number of Jews the Jewish Nation is comprised of, when we follow G-d's will, our truest number, our real value, becomes entirely uncountable and truly incalculable!

## Stories For The Soul

### Tears or Toil

Two men once approached the great Rabbi Meshulam Igra (1742-1801) in Tismenitz with a very complicated dispute. Rabbi Igra pondered the case for a considerable amount of time, but eventually told the men that they would have to return the next day so he would have more time to judge the case. The two men, who lived in another town, did not have time to delay their trip home, and instead decided to travel home and consult their own rabbi.

The men traveled home and went directly to their rabbi. The rabbi had never encountered such a difficult case, and he told the men to wait; he then enclosed himself in a private room. Shortly thereafter, he left the room and presented his ruling. The men were satisfied, and they left in peace.

A few months later, the two men again traveled to Tismenitz on business. They decided to take the opportunity to ask Rabbi Igra how he had judged their dispute. Rabbi Igra told them what his ruling had been, and they realized it was the exact ruling their rabbi had given them. They told Rabbi Igra that their local rabbi had come to the same conclusion in a mere half-hour.

Rabbi Igra, who was a brilliant Torah scholar, was astounded that a small-town rabbi could decide such a complex matter in so short a time. He immediately set out to meet this man, whom he thought must be an unknown Torah genius. When he arrived, he began talking with the rabbi, and got around to asking him how he had come to his conclusion so quickly.

The rabbi replied that he was, in fact, an average small-town rabbi, and when the men had approached him, he had no idea how he'd render a ruling. He locked himself in his room and cried to Hashem, "The people of my town

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## Kollel Happenings

### LEARN 2 LEARN

You have long dreamed of acquiring the tools to achieve proficiency in learning Gemara on your own. But how? The Denver Community Kollel offers a comprehensive, step-by-step, level-by-level program crafted for people just like you. All you need is the ability to read Hebrew; we will teach you the rest.

For more information, contact [rmh@denverkollel.org](mailto:rmh@denverkollel.org).

### INSIDE THE NUMBERS

In Judaism, numbers are not simply a way to count things. Every number has a special significance. From gematria to *Who Knows One?* recited at the end of the Passover Seder, discover the world of numbers with Rabbi Moshe Heyman of the Denver Community Kollel. Every other Thursday from 2-3 pm at Marathon Investments, 6565 South Dayton St., #1200.

For more info, contact [rmh@denverkollel.org](mailto:rmh@denverkollel.org).

### A DEEPER LOOK AT THE PARSHA WITH RABBI SHACHNE SOMMERS

Join Rabbi Shachne Sommers as he discusses a number of difficulties encountered in the weekly Torah portion, and develops a comprehensive approach to resolve the issue, simultaneously conveying a deeper understanding of the material being discussed. Sunday nights, 7:40-8:30 pm, at the Kollel for men, 1516 Xavier, and Tuesday nights at the Southeast Kollel Torah center, 8-9 pm, for men and women.

# Increase Your Jewish IQ

By: Rabbi Yaakov Zions

**Last week we asked:** The Talmud (Eruvin 43b) states that due to certain halachic principles, Eliyahu Hanavi (Elijah the Prophet) may not be able to inform us of the imminent redemption on Shabbos. What prayer is based on this fact?

**A:** On Motzoei Shabbos, after Shabbos has departed, we mention Eliyahu (in prayer and song) to ask for his coming.

**This week's question:** The Hebrew word for "us" is "anachnu"; in Aramaic, it is "anu." In the siddur, Aramaic occurs occasionally, though Hebrew is generally used. Can you think of a prayer where both the words *anachnu* and *anu* are used?

To submit an answer to Rabbi Zions, email [ryz@denverkollel.org](mailto:ryz@denverkollel.org)

## Ask the Rabbi It's Black and White

Ron Cohen wrote:

Dear Rabbi,

We are preparing a tour of Jewish artists for the Philadelphia Museum of Art. This is a world class museum with very little on Jewish art or artists. One artist mentions "black fire white fire" as the inspiration for one of his paintings. He says it is from the Zohar. Can you please give me some references or some other information on this? I can not find it. Thank You.

Dear Ron Cohen,

In the Zohar we find a statement that the Torah was written with "black fire upon white fire." One explanation of "black fire and white fire" is that black fire denotes Divine Mercy while white fire is Divine Justice. The

Maharsha explains that to appreciate G-d, one must recognize the fact that both mercy and judgment are Divine attributes.

Interestingly, the concept of colored fire recurs in Midrashic literature. According to the Midrash, G-d showed Moshe the menorah made out of white, green, red and black fire.

Sources:

-Zohar 3 Parshat Naso page 132a

-Devarim Rabbah Parsha 3

-Tanchuma, Parshat Shemini 10

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## Stories From the Soul

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cannot discern between a light matter and a complex one, and if I cannot provide a ruling for them, the honor of Heaven and the Torah will be degraded! Please, Hashem, have mercy on me and allow me to discover the proper approach to this quandary!" The rabbi continued that he had then approached the bookshelf and pulled a sefer off the shelf. Upon opening it, he discovered a discussion of a case very similar to his, and he was able to issue a ruling.

When Rabbi Igra heard this, he said, "Cry? I also know how to cry, but for the Torah one must labor and toil!"

Prayer is very important, both for our physical needs as well as our spiritual, including success in Torah. But when the Jewish People proclaimed "Naaseh venishma," We will do and we will listen, they were stating their willingness to not just observe the Torah, but to toil endlessly in the vast sea of Torah.