

Zera Shimshon

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Chapter LVIII: Esther

Essay 20. Singular acceptance and plural fulfillment

"קִיְמוּ (וקבל) [וקבלו] הַיהודים" וכו'. יש לדקדק למה פתיב "וקבל הַיהודים" בלשון יחיד, ומפל שפן בקרא דלעיל בסמוך דכתיב "וקבל הַיהודים את אשר-החלו לעשות" וקרינו הכי נמי "וקבל" בלשון יחיד.

"The Jews fulfilled and accepted upon themselves and their descendants, and all who might join them, to observe these two days in the manner prescribed and at the proper time each year."¹

One must examine why "and accepted" is written in the singular form, viz, וקבל [ve'kibel], although it is read as though it were written in the plural form, וקבלו [ve'kiblu].

All the more so, why is it written in this way but pronounced differently, **since in the adjacent verse it is written, "And the Jews accepted as an obligation that which they had begun to practice** and that Mordecai prescribed for them,"² where "and accepted" is not only written in the singular form, וקבל, **but also read as it is written, ve'kibel in the singular form.**

ומלבד מה שפתיבנו למעלה, יובן במאי דאמרינו בפרק קמא דהוריות (דף ג') אמר ר' יונתן מאה שישבו להורות אין חייבין עד שיראו כלם, דכתיב "ואם כל-עדת ישראל ישגו", עד שישגו כלם, דבכל התורה פולה קיימא לן רובו ככולו והכא פתיב כל העדה הואיל וכה אפילו הן מאה, מתבין רב משרשיא וכו' אין גוזרין גזירה על הציבור אלא אם כן רוב הציבור יכולים לעמוד בה, מאי קרא "ואתם קבעים הגוי כלו", אי איכא גוי כלו אין אי לא לא, והא הכא דכתיב "הגוי כלו" ורובא ככולא דמי, ותיבתא דרבי יונתן תיבתא ע"כ.

Aside from what we wrote above (Essay 14), this may be understood through what we say in the first chapter of Horayot (page 3b):

Rabbi Yonatan says: [Even in the case of] **one hundred [judges] who sit to issue a ruling [and erred], they are not liable [to bring an offering] unless they all issue that ruling, as it is written [regarding liability to bring the offering]: "And if the entire assembly of Israel shall act unwittingly,"³ until all of them err.**

- Horayot 3b

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¹ Esther 9:27.

² Esther 9:23.

³ Lev. 4:13.

We understand this view, **for throughout the entire Torah it is established for us that a majority is like the whole, yet here it is written “the entire congregation,” thus even if they are one hundred.** Returning to the Gemara:

Rav Mesharshiya raises an objection [to the statement of Rabbi Yonatan from a *Baraita*]: Our Sages relied on the statement of Rabban Shimon ben Gamliel and on the statement of Rabbi Elazar, son of Rabbi Tzadok, who would say: **One does not issue a decree upon the congregation unless the majority of the congregation is able to withstand it.**

Rav Adda bar Abba said: **What is the verse** [from which this principle is derived]? **“With the curse you are cursed, yet you rob Me, the entire nation.”**⁴ [The entire people took an oath to observe tithes, but violated that oath.] **If there is an entire nation, yes; if not, no. Yet here it is written, “the entire nation,” and** [Rabban Shimon ben Gamliel and Rabbi Elazar, son of Rabbi Tzadok, relied on this verse to derive that the legal status of] **the majority is [considered] like the whole.** [Thus,] **the refutation of Rabbi Yonatan is [indeed] a conclusive refutation.**

- Horayot 3b

גמצינו למדים שאף היכא דכתיבא מלת "כל" אמרינן רובו ככולו, ומעתה כשיקרא הכתוב להשמיענו במקום אהד שכלם דנקא ולא רובם, אין תקנה אלא לכתוב בלשון יחיד, דהכי מצינו "ויסח־שם ישראל" וכו' שאמרו ז"ל בלב אהד פאיש אהד, והכי נמי נימא שרצה הכתוב להשמיענו שכל היהודים קבלו עליהם לעשות פורים, ואם הנה אומר "נקבלו היהודים" הייתי אומר שהרוב לבדו קבלו עליהם, והוא הדין נמי אם הנה אומר "נקבלו כל היהודים", ומשום הכי אמר "וקבל" בלשון יחיד כדי להשמיענו שכלם פאחד קבלו עליהם ולא תימא הרוב בלבד.

We thus learn that even where the word “all” is written, we say that the majority is like the whole. From now on, when Scripture wishes to teach us in a particular place that all of them specifically—and not merely the majority—it has no remedy other than to write in the singular form. Thus we find, “And Israel encamped there in front of the mountain,”⁵ concerning which [the rabbis] of blessed memory said: “with one heart, like one person.”⁶ So too here we may say that Scripture wished to teach us that all the Jews accepted upon themselves to observe Purim; for had it said “and the Jews accepted,” using the plural form not only verbally but also in writing, I would have said that only the majority accepted it upon themselves. The same would apply even had it said “and all the Jews accepted.” Therefore, it said “and accepted” [וקבל] in writing in the singular form, in order to inform us that all of them, as one, accepted it upon themselves, and not merely the majority.

⁴ Malachi 3:9.

⁵ Ex. 19:2.

⁶ Mechilta, Parashat Yitro.

ואם תאמר אם כן למה לא כתיב נמי "קיים וקבל היהודים" להשימנו שכלם קיימו מצות פורים, דמדכתיב "קיימו" משמע נמי הרוב. ויש לומר דאין הכי נמי שלעגנו הקיים אי אפשר לומר שכלם כאחד קיימו, שהרי אין כלם מקיימין בשנה, שהרי בעגנו מתנות לאביונים העניים פטורים, כמו שכתב הפרי חדש בסימן תרצ"ד וזה לשונו, יש מי שכתב שיעני המתפרנס מן העדקה שחייב גם הוא במתנות לאביונים, ואין לזה טעם, ומסתברא ודאי דפטירי עכ"ל.

If you will say: if so, why is it not written as well “the Jews fulfilled and accepted,” with the word “fulfilled” written in the singular, קיים [ki’yem], to inform us that all of them fulfilled the commandment of Purim—since from the plural word *ki’yemu* [קיימו] it also implies the majority? One may say that this is indeed the case: with regard to fulfillment it is impossible to say that all of them, as one, fulfilled it, for not all fulfill it equally. For regarding gifts to the poor, the poor themselves are exempt, as the Pri Chadash wrote in siman 694 (letter 1), and this is his language: “There are those who wrote that a poor person who is supported by charity is himself obligated in gifts to the poor, but this has no basis. Rather, it is reasonable and certain that they are exempt.”⁷

ואף בסימן תרצ"ה שכתב בהגהה ואשה חייבת במתנות לאביונים ומשלוח מנות כאיש, כתב הפרי חדש אין דין זה מחנור ד"איש" כתיב ולא "אשה" ומנין לו זה עכ"ל. ועוד האבל אינו יכול לשמוח בפורים, דיש מי שאומר שכל דברי אבילות נוהגים בו, ולפחות דברים שבצנעה נוהג.

Even in siman 695 (se’if 4) of the Shulchan Aruch, Yoreh De’ah, where the gloss writes that a woman is obligated in gifts to the poor and in sending portions just like a man, the Pri Chadash wrote that “this ruling is not clear, for it is written ‘man’ and not ‘woman.’ From where does he derive this?”

Moreover, a mourner cannot rejoice on Purim, for there are those who say that all the laws of mourning apply on it, or at least those matters practiced in private.

ואם כן לעגנו הקיים אינם כלם שווים כאחד, אבל לעגנו לקבל עליהם מצות פורים דהיינו לעשות זכר לגם, כלם כאחד קיבלו עליהם, ומשום הכי מעיקרא כתיב "וקבל היהודים את אשר החלו לעשות" בלשון יחיד, וקרינו הכי נמי בלשון יחיד, ושם מייירי בכללות הזכר של הגם, אבל בקרא בתרא כתיב "קיימו" לפי שבקיום לא השוו כלם כאחד, וכתב "וקבל" וקרינו "וקבלו" לפי שבקבלה השוו כלם, דאף מי שבא לו האבילות בר מינו עם כל זה כבר קבל עליו, אגמם לפי שבגושים ודומיהו יש מחלוקת, משום הכי קרינו "וקבלו", דהיינו לקיום המצות הפרטיות דהיינו משלוח מנות וכו' לא השוו כלם, שהרי הנשים לא נצטוו ולא קבלו עליהן.

Thus, with regard to “fulfillment” they are not all equal as one, so it would be inappropriate to give the singular verb form. But with regard to “accepting” upon themselves the commandment of Purim—namely, to make a remembrance of the miracle—all of them, as one, accepted it upon themselves. Therefore, initially it is written, “And the Jews accepted as an obligation that which they had begun to practice,” with “accepting” being written in the

⁷ Rabbi Hezekiah da Silva (1659–98), *Pri Chadash* (Amsterdam 1691) is a commentary on the Yoreh De’ah section of the Shulchan Aruch.

singular form, וְקִבַּל, and we read it likewise in the singular, and there it refers generally to the remembrance of the miracle. But in the later verse it is written “they fulfilled” [קִיְמִוּ] [ki’yemu], because in fulfillment they were not all made equal as one; and it writes “and accepted” in the singular form וְקִבַּל, while we read וְקִבְּלוּ [ve’kiblu] in the plural form, because in acceptance they were all made equal. For even one upon whom mourning had come—Heaven forbid—nevertheless had already accepted it upon himself. However, since regarding women and the like there is a dispute, therefore we read וְקִבְּלוּ [ve’kiblu] in the plural form, meaning that with regard to the fulfillment of the particular commandments—namely, sending portions, etc.—they were not all equal, for women were not commanded and did not accept them upon themselves.

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