




Rabbi Eliezer Zalmanov  2 minutes ago 3 min read

Talk is cheap

In our world, where communication has become increasingly accessible and pervasive, we often find ourselves bombarded with words. People make promises, express intentions, and articulate grand plans, but all too often, these words fail to translate into tangible results. It is in this context that the age-old adage rings true: “Actions speak louder than words.” The power of action lies in its ability to transcend mere verbal rhetoric and transform intentions into impactful outcomes.

Actions have an innate ability to inspire and motivate others in ways that words alone cannot achieve. When individuals witness someone taking proactive steps towards their goals, it stirs a sense of inspiration within them. For instance, a leader who leads by example, consistently demonstrating determination and dedication, becomes a source of motivation for their followers. The visible evidence of progress through action serves as a catalyst for others to pursue their own achievements. By observing someone’s deeds, people witness the power of perseverance, pushing them to overcome obstacles and strive for success themselves.

A classic example of actions being greater than words and leading by example, can be found in the beginning of the Book of Numbers, where—true to its name—a census is taken of all the Jewish people in the desert. Every individual was counted by Moses and the leaders of the tribes, and the tally of each tribe was then combined with all the other tribes, resulting in the grand total of Jewish males over the age of 20 at the time: 603,550 (plus 22,000 Levites, who were counted from the age of 30 days old).

The purpose of the census was to highlight the significance of every individual Jew. Because each individual was counted, and then each tribe, and finally all of Israel together, we understand that while the impact of a community as a whole is certainly fundamental, a group can only be as powerful as the individuals it comprises. We each bring our own value to the table, whether it’s our talents or skills, along with the fact that we have a Jewish soul, and together we form a strong enough collective to effectively make a difference.

This is central to the survival of the Jewish nation, and it plays a large role in the ultimate goal of Jewish unity. When the individuals are valued, the nation as a whole benefits.

But in order for the value of the individual to be properly emphasized, Moses was instructed by G-d to include the leaders of the tribes in the task of taking the census. Although Moses could have done it himself, as he had on other occasions, for this particular census he was instructed to have a team. The twelve leaders of the tribes of Israel were the ones who actually counted the Jewish people.

These twelve leaders didn’t only count their respective tribes, they were each involved in the census of the other eleven tribes too, because that’s how you show true leadership. Talking about the value of each individual is nice, but the tribal leaders’ direct involvement in the census translated their words into action.

Each leader caring not only for his own tribe but also about each and every individual in the other tribes, was how they demonstrated genuine leadership; they showed their followers how it's done. Don't just pay lip service to Jewish unity, we must actually be there for every single fellow Jew, in good times and not. And through their leading by example, they set the stage for all future generations, especially for us today, to follow suit.