

“Take a census of the entire assembly of Bnei Yisrael according to their families, according to their fathers’ household.” (1:2)

The Torah pays great attention to the individual pedigree of each Jew. Indeed, the *Yalkut* states that when *Klal Yisrael* received the Torah, the nations of the world became jealous: “Why did Hashem give the Torah to *Klal Yisrael* rather than to any other nation?” Hashem responded to them, “Bring Me your *Sefer Yuchsin*, Book of Lineage, as My children did.” This is a reference to *pasuk* 18, “and they established their genealogy.” Since the count was done according to tribe, the people had to establish the tribe to which they belonged either by written documents or valid witnesses. One reason for this strict requirement of family purity was so that the *zechus*, merit, of their forefathers would bring Hashem’s Divine assistance during the impending wars. This is why *Klal Yisrael* was counted when they came to *Midbar Sinai*, to teach that the reason they received the Torah was their *yichus*, pedigree.

The words of *Chazal* beg elucidation. First, why were the nations envious of *Klal Yisrael*? They had the same opportunity to receive the Torah as *Klal Yisrael*. Hashem went to every nation – and they rejected the Torah because it did not coincide with their moral character. Second, what is the meaning of the idea that *Klal Yisrael* merited the Torah because of their *Sefer Yuchsin*? Should pedigree play such a critical role in receiving the Torah?

Horav Simchah Hakohen Shepps, z.l., in his *Sefer, Simchas HaTorah*, explains that the nations remonstrated, “Why did Hashem compel *Klal Yisrael* to accept the Torah and not us?” *Chazal* describe the scenario as Hashem raising *Har Sinai* above the heads of *Klal Yisrael* and declaring, “If you accept the Torah, good. If not, here will be your graves.” This is what the gentile nations envied: this unparalleled relationship, this unprecedented love. Why were they not coerced into acceptance?