

## And they established their genealogy according to their families, according to the household of their fathers. (1:18)

The count was carried out according to tribe. Thus, it was required for everyone to establish his tribal lineage, either by written documentation or by the testimony of witnesses. Lineage was important in order to determine exactly where each individual belonged. Pedigree, however, should not become the barometer for judging people, for promoting success, for determining an individual's potential or position. Success is earned; it is an achievement for which one toils, for which one must be personally worthy. "Surprisingly," there are people who do not have *yichus*, exceptional pedigree. They are simple, regular, common people, who do what is required of them and serve Hashem with *temimus*, wholesomeness, perfection. They do not warrant articles in the paper; when their children become engaged, they do not have pages of advertisements congratulating the heralded event. They live and die, and no one reports about them. They are as valuable to *Hashem Yisborach*, however, as the most "decorated" Jews. *Mi k'amacha Yisrael?* "Who is like Your nation, *Yisrael?*" These are the *amcha*, the common Jew, who is so much more significant than the false accolades received by the "others."

I write this on *Parashas Bamidbar*, because I just read a beautifully crafted vignette by Rabbi Hillel Goldberg, who writes a poignant appreciation of Count Valentin Potocki, or – as we know him – the *Ger Tzedek*, righteous convert, of Vilna, Avraham *ben* Avraham. I was, of course, moved by his masterful rendering and beautifully worded tribute to this enormously, spiritually inspiring human being. There is something that he adds which inspired me to include it in *Peninim* for *Parashas Bamidbar*, the *Shabbos* which usually precedes *Shavuus*.

*Rav Avraham ben Avraham, zl*, was burned at the stake, in a brutally horrific death, on the second day of *Shavuus*. It was 1749. His death took place on the day that we recite *Yizkor*, the memorial prayer for our loved ones who are no longer with us. Consequently, on every *Shavuus*, a separate *Yizkor* was recited in the main *shul* in Vilna for this *kadosh*, holy *neshamah*.

You see, *Rav Avraham ben Avraham* was a *ger* who had not married. Thus, he had no parents, no wife, no children. He was all alone in the world – like so many people that we know and tend to ignore. There was no one to recite *Yizkor* for him, so the residents of Vilna did – until the Nazis put an end to *Yizkor* and Vilna in 1941.

One would assume that like so many other sacred traditions that have fallen into oblivion, remembering *Rav Avraham ben Avraham* would follow suit. Rabbi Goldberg informs his readers that, in Congregation Ahavas Yisrael in Passaic, NJ, Rabbi Ron Eisenman reinstated the tradition. Now that the memory of the righteous convert has been taken care of, we should address the many other "faceless" and "nameless" people all around us, whom we forget about, simply because they have no pedigree to impose upon our consciences.