

## "When you take a census of Bnei Yisrael according to their numbers, every man shall give an atonement for his soul." (30:12)

The census of *Bnei Yisrael* was accomplished by taking a half-*shekel* coin from each person and then counting the coins. *Bnei Yisrael* used the proceeds of this collection to purchase the *korbanos tzibbur*, communal *Mizbayach* offerings. While the collection of funds was associated with a census, the *Torah* does not mention any specific reason for the actual census. It certainly was not needed for military purposes, as was the case later in the time of Shaul *Ha'Melech* and David *Ha'Melech*. We must, therefore, accept the explanation that *Rashi* suggests in the beginning of *Sefer Bamidbar*. He posits that Hashem counts *Bnei Yisrael* as a reflection of His deep love for them.

**Horav Eli Munk, zl**, in his commentary *Kol HaTorah* comments that counting *Bnei Yisrael* evokes Hashem's love for them. He attributes this phenomenon to the fact that in order to be counted, each Jew was required to produce proof of his lineage. They would establish their genealogy, demonstrating the purity of their Jewish lineage by producing genealogical documents and witnesses to confirm their origins. Thus, each individual could be a member of his individual family and tribe. In the *Talmud Kiddushin 70b* Chazal state that *Klal Yisrael's* pure origins constitute the essential pre-requisite for establishing the *Shechinah* here on earth. Indeed, when the nations of the world demanded a share in the world, Hashem rejoined, "Bring Me proof of your genealogy as *Bnei Yisrael* have done."

Thus, the census taking was a source of pride for *Bnei Yisrael*. We now understand the specific use of the phrase, *at liftei rosh*, "When you will lift up the head," which Chazal interpret, "When you will take a census." The Jews have something about which to "lift up their heads." They have a wonderful feeling that accompanies achieving status. The morally pure implications of the census serves to compensate for much of the persecution that we suffer in that it raises our self-esteem, promoting the dignity and nobility of the Jew.

Yet, comments *Horav Munk*, *yichus*, worthy lineage, is not identical to personal merit. A noble pedigree does not necessarily breed noble behavior. The presence of the *Shechinah* among men is confirmed only through exemplary acts on man's own part. The *Torah* placed upon the Jew the *mitzvah* of the half-*shekel* in order to avail him the opportunity to contribute materially towards the needs of the community. Likewise, one who is "*osaik b'tzarchei tzibbur*," looks after the needs of the community, does not disappear among the populace. He can lift his head high and be counted as an individual personality in the conglomerate of *Am Yisrael*.

It is notable that the factors of Jewish pedigree via the medium of family purity and communal responsibility in caring for the needs of all Jews are particularly lacking in today's society. While some have broken down the foundation of Jewish lineage through their blatant assimilation, others

have ignored the plight of the simple Jew. The simple Jew does not need much - only a half-*shekel*, a smile, a handshake, a good morning, or just to be recognized. We must remember that our source of pride is our individuality. This uniqueness develops directly from our concern and respect for each individual.