

When you take a census of Bnei Yisrael according to their numbers. (30:12)

How does one count the Jewish People? We are taught that at the *Bris Bein HaBesarim*, Covenant of the Parts, Hashem promised Avraham *Avinu*, "Gaze now, toward the Heavens, and count the stars if you are able to count them...so shall your offspring be!" (*Bereishis* 15:5) We are not countable – just like the stars. Likewise, it says that the number of Jews will be like the sand of the sea – which also cannot be counted. The *Talmud Yoma* 22b, distinguishes between a time in which the Jewish People carry out the will of Hashem and a time in which they do not. How is it possible not to be countable? Numbers are an absolute. If one has a machine capable of counting at his disposal, he will ultimately be able to count them. If they are people, and there are numbers available, then they can be counted.

Horav Yosef Shalom Elyashiv, zl, explains that the key is to compare *Klal Yisrael* to stars. *Koh yiheyeh zaracha*, "So will be your offspring," is a reference to qualitative value, not quantitative. Every star gives off its own degree of light. Some stars have a certain amount of light, while others have hundreds of times more light. Thus, it is impossible to count the qualitative number of stars, because the light which emerges from each individual star is distinct from the others, and hence, uncountable.

When Jews carry out the will of Hashem they are not countable, because each Jew serves Hashem on his own personal *madreigah*, spiritual level. Each Jew shines differently. When they are not worthy of qualitative counting, however, when it is their bodies which are counted – it is quite a different story.

Ki Sisa es rosh Bnei Yisrael – V'nasnu ish kofer nafsho laHashem, "When you take a census of *Bnei Yisrael* according to their numbers, every man shall give Hashem an atonement for his soul." The Jewish Nation is not counted as other nations are counted. The other nations count bodies. We do not count bodies, because, by placing a quantitative number on the Jewish People, we are attributing distinction to the body – not the mind. When the body has greater value than the mind, we are risking a plague.

When we count by having each Jew offer an atonement for his soul, we demonstrate that our concern is to know how many Jews care about Torah and *Klal Yisrael*. How many Jews take an active role in participating with the nation? How many Jews sacrifice themselves for Torah? They are the ones to be counted! They are the ones who are included in Moshe *Rabbeinu's* book, his roll book of the nation. They are the ones who comprise *Knesses Yisrael*.