

"Count the Bnei Levi according to their father's household, according to their families, every male from one month of age and up." (3:15)

Moshe and Aharon were instructed to count *Bnei Levi* in a manner much different than the rest of *Bnei Yisrael*. *Bnei Yisrael* were counted once, from the age of twenty to sixty years of age. *Bnei Levi*, on the other hand, were counted twice. In the first census, they were counted from the age of one month and above. There was no minimum, since the thirty day old age only ensured the viability of the child. There also was no maximum age for *Leviim*. In the second census, the *Leviim* were counted according to their eligibility for service. This census had a minimum age of thirty years old and a maximum of fifty. What is the rationale for the disparities between the two censuses of *Bnei Levi* and the census of the rest of *Yisrael*?

Horav Yosef Shaul Natenson, zl, takes a very practical approach to reconciling the differences between the countings. Members of *Bnei Yisrael* each achieved his distinction based upon his own merit. Thus, each had to earn his way and demonstrate his maturity and ability to go forward to represent the nation. The age of twenty years was designated as the appropriate time for acceptance in the legion of *Yisrael*. The merit of the *Levi* was inherited. He received access to the *Leviah* from his father. Hence, he was inducted as soon as it was clear that his birth was viable.

In order to serve in the *Mikdash*, however, it was essential that each *Levi* be especially deserving of the distinction. In fact, he had to wait until the age of thirty -ten years longer than a *Yisrael* waited! This teaches us an important lesson. The greater one's *yichus*, ancestry, the more noble one's pedigree, the more he is expected to live up to the standards of the role he is to play in the spiritual development of *Klal Yisrael*. *Yichus* is not a license, it is a privilege which one must continually earn.