

"Take a census of the entire assembly of Bnei Yisrael according to their families, according to their father's household, by number of the names.... from twenty years of age and up, everyone who goes out to the legion in Yisrael." (1:2,3)

This is the third census within a relatively short period of time. When *Bnei Yisrael* left Egypt, the *Torah* (*Shemos* 12:37) states, "About six hundred thousand men on foot aside from children." Once again, after the sin of the Golden Calf, Hashem counted them by means of a half *shekel* to determine how many were left after the sinners had died. The *Torah* (*Shemos* 38:26) states, "A half-shekel ... for everyone who passed through the census takers, from twenty years of age and up for the six hundred three thousand, five hundred fifty." As they are now counted once again, after the dedication of the *Mishkan* the total remains the same. Initially, the three censuses seem the same. A few disparities, however, are noted in the text between the third census and the previous two.

First, the *Torah* devotes a significant portion of our *parsha* to the results of the third census, more than to either of the previous two censuses. Second, the *Torah* now refers to the counted men by a new name, "*yotzai tzava*," those who go out to the legion. They seem to have lost their simple status as, "*gevarim*," men on foot, or "*pekudim*," those who passed through the census. Third, in this last census they are first counted "according to their families, according to their fathers' household, by number of the names," then each tribe individually followed by a general total. After they are divided into formation according to the *degalim*, their number is reiterated individually and collectively. Finally, after the universal census is completed, a separate census is made for *Shevet Levi*, from one month old and above. This is followed by a census of the *bechorim*, first-born, and completed by a census of the *Levi* from thirty years of age until fifty. What is the purpose of this grandiose census? Why is so much space dedicated to it, especially when so little space is devoted to the two prior censuses?

Horav Elchanan Sorotzkin, zl, offers a novel insight into the matter. The *Torah* teaches a lesson regarding the amazing transformation of the "six hundred thousand men" who left Egypt. They developed from members of the house of slavery and affliction to become those who built the *Mishkan* as a place for the *Shechinah* to repose. Although, before they were counted a second time they had already received the *Torah* -- an unparalleled spiritual revelation -- they, nonetheless, transgressed with the tragic sin of the Golden Calf. Accordingly, the revelation at Sinai remained merely a "betrothal" between *Klal Yisrael* and Hashem. The final "*chupah* and *nessuin*" -- the culmination of their spiritual transformation -- did not take place until the final construction of the *Mishkan*.

Finally, the "*kallah*," *Knesses Yisrael*, entered into spiritual matrimony with Hashem. No longer were they *gevarim*; gone were the *pekudim*; now they were *yotzei tzava*! They were inducted into

Hashem's royal legion of service. Each Jew was a special star that shone brightly. Each individual achieved a status unlike ever before attained in his relationship with the Almighty. Being counted "according to their names" reflected this elevated stature. The *Torah* did not consider it redundant to recount this last census in detail. The newly acquired distinctiveness of *Bnei Yisrael* warranted this unique expression of Hashem's love and esteem for us.