

"Take the sum of all the congregation of Bnei Yisrael by their families, by their father's households... from twenty years and upward." (1:2,3)

In Jewish life, as well as in contemporary society, the family unit constitutes the most basic social unit. The center of Jewish life always has been -- and will always be -- the home. The home is the place in which parents prepare their children physically, emotionally, intellectually, and spiritually to serve Hashem in the Jewish way.

The collapse of traditional Judaism in America has followed the breakdown of the Jewish home as it has functioned for thousands of years. The secularization of the Jewish family, effected by assimilation into American society, was the precursor of the spiritual decline of the synagogue. Indeed, those observers who acknowledge the synagogue as the center of Jewish life have only been privy to the most insipid and sterile forms of Jewish life.

The Jewish home represents a unity of great vibrance, which reflects Divine Law in action. The principles of *Torah* are not abstract codes. They must be realized in the Jewish home. The home is the place in which *kedushah*, sanctity, *Torah* and *mitzvos* are translated into real life, in which children are imbued with the principles of *Torah* Judaism and, in which adults live in accordance with the Divine Will.

This idea, suggests *Horav S.R. Hirsch z.l.*, is revealed by the *Torah* in this *pasuk*. The enumeration of the men takes into account both the family, and *the tribe*. Every able bodied man was to serve *Klal Yisrael* only after he had fulfilled his immediate obligations to his family. The nation must promote the ideal of family life and ensure its well-being. The state is built and maintained upon the foundation set by the family nucleus, without which there can be no state.

This concern for the family unit, notes *Horav Hirsch*, is a response to a long standing question. Since, according to the *Torah* a young man becomes an adult at the age of thirteen, why were men counted in the census only from the age of twenty? The *Torah* quite possibly wanted to preserve those first seven years of maturity to transmit the family's spiritual and moral values to the adolescent prior to his induction as a member of the nation. This does not preclude a youth's duty to serve Hashem always and to perform all of His *mitzvos*. The *Torah* only suggests that it might be counter-productive to give the young too great a responsibility in the affairs of the nation before they have completed their training for life.