

## Take a census of the entire assembly of Bnei Yisrael according to their father's house. (1:2)

The *Zera Shimshon* wonders why the Torah traces each Jew's lineage from his father's line, rather than from his mother's. First, a child's Jewish identity is determined by his mother. (Matrilineal descent is one of the areas which the secular streams have attempted to alter, due to their diminishing numbers.) Second, the women in Egypt were at the center of safeguarding *yichus*, lineage, of the Jewish People. They refused to be violated by the Egyptians. Indeed, in addressing the familial names of each tribe, the Torah writes, *mishpachas ha'Reuveni*, *mishpachas ha'Shimoni*, "the family of Reuven, the family of Shimon" (Ibid. 26:7,14). *Chazal* teach that Hashem added the letter *hay* at the beginning and *yud* at the end which together spell Hashem's Name (*Yud, Kay, Kay*). This was Hashem's way of attesting to the Jewish women's chastity.

Since the women played such a critical role in the redemption, by maintaining the purity of the Jewish bloodlines, should the Torah not classify the Jewish people according to their mothers, rather than their fathers? The *Zera Shimshon* cites *Chazal* (*Kiddushin* 71a) who say, "Being a man of peace who distances himself from discord is a sign of pure lineage." This indication applies to men because they are the individuals whose role in life is accentuated in the public arena. From *shul* to the *bais hamedrash* to various programs where they are constantly engaged in social/spiritual interaction with others, it is in this venue in which controversy can germinate. The Jewish woman (in those days) remained homebound in her palace, living in solitary splendor: *Kol kevudah bas melech penimah*; "The entire glory of the king's daughter lies on the inside" (*Tehillim* 45:14). She does not become involved in the conflicts that plague the outside world. Thus, the barometer of peace is ,a sign of pure lineage for practical reasons, applicable primarily to men. The Torah, therefore, underscores that it is the rectitude of *Klal Yisrael's Avos*, Patriarchs, more than anything else, that is an indicator of pure lineage.