



In this day and age of rampant assimilation, the opening command of Sefer Bamidbar, signifying to Moshe to conduct a census of males of twenty years and up, should surely attract our attention. Of particular interest is the phraseology of the edict: "Take a census... by the number of names, every male according to their head-count" (Bamidbar 1:2).

In contradistinction to a previous count, this census was conducted, not by the employment of a half-shekel per head, but by a direct accounting of each male.

Moreover, a leader of each tribe was to be present at the census and, later, these tribes were to surround the Mishkan in the desert, such that every man would be [stationed] at his camp and every man at his banner, according to their legions (1:52).

This numerical reckoning of the people had a function far beyond a reckoning of the military potential prior to the people's entry into Eretz Yisrael. We discern that each of the selected individuals in the census is a world unto his own and not just a number assessed by coins: He is a member of a family and particular tribe; he commits to his clan

and has a unique connection to his tribe's leader.

Now, each tribe with its particular character will yet join the other tribes in surrounding the Levite camp and the Mishkan, such that the individual included in the census is encouraged to set his sights on the broader national and religious mission. From this standpoint, we surely deduce that what counts is our commitment to the holy ideals represented by the Mishkan from the individual, communal, and national perspectives - each as important as the other and operating in tandem. **MP**