



## DIVREI MENACHEM

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### A United Family

Parshat Bemidbar opens with the command for the people to be counted in the wilderness. Of interest, both Rashi and Rav Hirsch note, in slightly different contexts, that the command was associated with (a) the Mishkan (one month after its completion) and (b) the Ohel Mo'ed (where the directive was given).

Thus, the census surely had something to do with the national goal of placing the Mishkan, and the purpose for which it stood, at the center of the people's consciousness. No wonder, then, that the Parsha continues to describe how the tribes surrounded the Mishkan in the center of their encampment.

The appropriate males to be counted were members of families, subsumed under the title "the house of their fathers." The collected numbers in each of these houses constituted the sum of the specified individuals in the tribe. Collectively, the tribes represented עדת בני ישראל – the totality that was The Congregation of the Children of Israel.

Recent tragic events in Israel have perhaps sharpened the significance of that census for our times. In the post-modern era, the distinctions between the traditional family unit and "alternative" arrangements are

dissipating at an extraordinarily fast rate. It is no longer "politically correct" to talk of the house of one's father and mother. Rather, one (supposedly) talks of "parents" (independent of gender). Whatever happened to the *Kedushah* associated with *Kiddushin* and the mitzva of *Peru Urevu*?

Moreover, the tragic event in Meron brought the significance of the census in the wilderness into extreme focus. Each of the fallen on Lag Ba'omer was a family member of his household (מבית אבותם). Each was a proud Jew linking present to a magnificent past, a link in the chain of *Mesorah* extending back thousands of years. Each was holding a torch for the values of Torah and tradition.

And in their demise, the stricken families were joined in mourning and prayer by hundreds of thousands of sympathizers from all walks of life who yet represented the whole of Am Yisrael. Following R. Hirsch, at that time, we were all united "in the higher union of all, originating from one common house into בית ישראל."

May we all thus recognize our roots and be counted. May Hashem have mercy on us, and speedily in our days capitalize on that sudden surge of unity and bring unity to his glorious Name. ■

Shabbat Shalom! *Menachem Persoff*