

Making Everyone Count

In this week's *Torah* portion *Ki Sisa*, we are told that the Jewish nation was counted through their contribution of a half *shekel* each. This process illustrates several interesting points. First, this method of counting a population by contribution sends a symbolic message that no one is complete on their own. Jews have to consider themselves incomplete without the rest of *Klal Yisrael*. This message is timeless and applies to all people as we are taught from an early age to respect all individuals because everyone has unique talents to offer and contribute to a community.

Another fascinating fact about the counting and its timeless message is demonstrated by *Moshe* and *Aharon's* behavior during the counting. The commentaries say that *Moshe* and *Aharon* went to every tent to count the Jewish people. By personally visiting each Jew, these great leaders made everyone feel special. Unfortunately, in today's society, the greater one becomes the more difficult it is to have direct contact with him/her. Judaism teaches us that no matter how important one is, one must still connect with people.

There is a story about a great Rabbi and Jewish leader that exemplifies the above census taking lessons. This Rabbi had a custom to stand up for anyone who came to see him, young or old. He was once asked by a student why he did this. The Rabbi responded, "If they are older than I, they have done more *mitzvot* and if they are younger than I, they have less sins." His perspective allowed him to show respect to everyone he encountered. His actions, modeled after *Moshe* and *Aharon*, epitomize great leadership. We should take this lesson to heart, to recognize all people no matter their station in life. Making everyone count will strengthen our bonds with all of those in our community creating a more unified and productive body.