

See, I present before you today. (11:26)

The *pasuk* begins with *re'eh*, see, which is *lashon yachid*, singular, as if Moshe *Rabbeinu* were speaking to an individual person. It concludes, however, *lifneichem*, before you, which is *lashon rabim*, plural. Why is there an inconsistency within the *pasuk*? Apparently, the Torah is according distinction to the individual who is part of the community. All too often, the individual becomes lost within the large scope of a multitude of people. He becomes a number, a blip, a faceless statistic; his name does not matter; who he is carries no weight, since he is assimilated into the group. While it is true that the Torah uses *lifneichem*, before you – all of you – each individual plays a leading role before Hashem.

We never know the extent of the impact we have on a single person, and how many others will be positively affected by the impact we have had on this one individual. A short while ago, a distinguished lecturer was invited to speak to the members of a middle-sized congregation. He was scheduled to speak following the *Maariv*, Evening service. As is common in many *shuls*, since *Maariv* is the last *tefillah*, prayer, of the day, people tend to gravitate towards the exit before the service has been completed. Indeed, by the time the last *Kaddish* is recited, many members of the *minyan* are already warming up their cars. For some reason, that night no one remained in *shul*, except for the *shul's shamesh*, sexton, and one other member. "Something must be going on tonight. I have never seen such a mass exodus from *shul*," the *shamesh* apologetically remarked to the speaker. "This is highly unusual. I guess we will have to try again another night."

"No," said the speaker. "I am here, and I will speak." The speaker ascended to the lectern and gave a brilliant speech in his usual passionate manner, as if he were speaking to a packed house.

After the speech, the *shamesh* thanked the speaker and once again underscored how surprised he was that he had gone all out for an audience of only two listeners. The speaker, who was the consummate professional, replied, "So what? Does an ambulance not use its lights and siren to save only one person? This is no different. Every individual is worth an entire speech – and more!"

A plethora of stories emphasizes the individual and how one who is involved in outreach should not hold back from giving "all" of himself to even the smallest audience. We never know what that one person, one student, one family, will achieve in life, as a result of our inspiration. I had such an incident and it made me a believer. It was the end of the 70's, and I was living in Phoenix, Arizona. Then, it was not the sizable Jewish community that it is today. I had advertised a class on the philosophy of Judaism to be held at the local Jewish community center. No charge, with refreshments, seemed to work in those days; despite the less-than-exciting topic. The class was called for 8:00 p.m. By 8:30, when no one had come, I decided to leave. I was somewhat upset and deflated, but it was an unpopular topic in a city that was fairly distant from Judaism and religious Jewish thought.

A half hour later, I cleaned up and began to walk to my car. A young man (about nineteen at the

time) came over and asked where the “Jewish class” was being held. My response was simple: “Here.” We began to talk. He was from San Jose, California, attending the university. He had just had a bad experience with drugs and was searching for some meaning in life. Although Jewish by birth, he had not seen the inside of a *shul* since his *bar-mitzvah*, and, truthfully, it had not been much of a *shul* or much of a *bar-mitzvah*.

Despite years of alienation from a religion about which he knew nothing, that night changed his life – and taught me the importance of each individual person. We spent the next few months in discussion, learning and celebrating the *Shabbos* experience with my family. Today, he is a grandfather who lives in *Eretz Yisrael*, learns half a day, supports three sons-in-law in *Kollel*, and is the pillar of his small community outside of Yerushalayim. Had I left five minutes earlier, or not bothered to speak with only one person, when I had planned on teaching a class – who knows where he, his children and grandchildren would be today?