

You shall sound a broken blast on the Shofar... on Yom Kippur you shall sound the Shofar throughout the land... and you shall proclaim freedom throughout the land. (25:9,10)

The *mitzvah* of sounding the *Shofar* on *Yom Kippur* of the *Yovel* – fiftieth year – is unlike the *mitzvah* of sounding the *Shofar* on *Rosh Hashanah*. The *Sefer HaChinuch* explains that on *Rosh Hashanah*, the purpose of the *Shofar* is to help us focus on the *Akeidas Yitzchak*, Binding of Yitzchak Avinu, thus encouraging us to think of his extraordinary *ahavas Hashem*, love for the Almighty. We, too, should learn from his example and thus imbue ourselves with love for Hashem, thereby increasing our merits on this day when all of Hashem's creations are judged. On *Yom Kippur* of the *Yovel*, however, the sounding of the *Shofar* is to publicize the right to freedom, which the slaves now have earned.

The *eved Ivri*, Hebrew indentured slave, goes free during the *Yovel*. The *Shofar* blast is his signal. It also provides the owner with an important message. He has benefited from the services of his *eved* for some time – and rightfully so. After all, he did pay a pretty penny for the right to have him as his *eved*. No one enjoys giving up a good thing, but nothing goes on forever. The moment of freedom has arrived for the *eved*. It is now time for the master to let him go. The *Shofar's* message is quite simple: This is taking place throughout the land. You are not the only one who is losing the services of his *eved*. Everybody is! We are all in this together. The mere fact that he is not alone engenders within the master a sense of limited acquiescence that, at first, might seem to be reluctance, but, in the end transforms to acceptance with the awareness that it is happening throughout the land.

The *eved* also requires a reminder that it is time to move on. During the previous few years, he has come to admire and look up to his master. He has become a part of his family. Indeed, when things were not going his way and life seemed cruel, his finances in the red zone, the master came to his rescue and bailed him out. He would not mind remaining in this warm, welcoming, supportive household. The *Shofar* reminds him that it is time to move on, to go home and rebuild his life.

In conclusion, the *Sefer HaChinuch* teaches us that the sounding of the *Shofar* on the *Yom Kippur* of *Yovel* presents a message of solidarity. The master is informed that this is taking place all over the Land, and the *eved* discovers that he is not the only one being freed. To paraphrase the words of the *Sefer HaChinuch*, *Ein davar she'yechazek libos bnei adam kemo maaseh ha'rabim*, "As there is nothing that strengthens the hearts of people like the action of many"; this truth cannot be overemphasized. The mere thought that one's actions can inspire and impact the lives of many is compelling. Everyone wants to inspire and bring merit to the many. Indeed, *Horav Aharon Leib Shteinman, zl*, would implore those who went to pray at the gravesites of the *tzaddikim*, righteous persons, to plead for him that he merit to continue being *mezakeh es ha'rabim*. The question is: How do we define *ziku ha'rabim*? How "many" comprise *rabim*? The manner in which *Rav Shteinman* defines the criteria for *ziku ha'rabim* is indicated by the following vignette.

A *rav* who served as *chazzan*, led the services, in a small *shul* in Bnei Brak was offered the opportunity to perform in the same capacity in another, much larger, congregation. The new *shul* was greater both in quantity of worshippers and in quality. In a synagogue in which the *davening* is on a higher, more intense level, the *chazzan* plays a critical role in the High Holy Days prayer service. He was tempted to leave his current position, but the *gabbaim* in charge of the *shul* were quite adamant in their reluctance to allow him to depart. He decided to seek the counsel of *Rav Shteinman*.

Rav Shteinman asked the *Rav* which *shul* would have an easier time finding another *chazzan*. His response was the larger *shul*, since it was a prestigious *minyán*, both in size and character of its worshippers. When *Rav Shteinman* heard this, he replied, "If this is the case, you must remain at the smaller *shul*."

Hearing this, the *Rav* countered, "The purpose of leading the services is *zikui ha'rabim*. Obviously, the opportunity to bring merit to the many increases manifold at the larger *shul*." *Rav Shteinman's* reply should serve as a lesson and definition of the principle of *zikui ha'rabim* for us all. "Who told you that *zikui ha'rabim* is determined by numbers?" *Rav Shteinman* asked. "*Zikui ha'rabim* is ascertained by where a person is needed most, where his impact will be greatest." *Rav Shteinman* compared this to an opportunity to render a lecture/class/study group for a large prestigious group, as opposed to a small, less-distinguished and sought-after group. Obviously, the larger group has no dearth of applicants for the job, while the smaller one must work at locating an impressive lecturer. *Zikui ha'rabim* demands that one go where he is most needed! *Rav Shteinman* added, "The rule concerning *zikui ha'rabim* is: The criteria for *avodas HaKodesh*, holy/spiritual service (on behalf of *Klal Yisrael*) is dependent on, and determined by, what Hashem will gain, where *kavod Shomayim*, glory of Heaven, will increase the most. (In other words, it is not about you/us – it is only about Hashem)."

Zikui ha'rabim is the primary motivating factor in undertaking to enter the field of *klal work*, ie. community service. *Zikui ha'rabim* is comprised of two words – some focus on the *rabim*, many, while the more idealistic place the emphasis on the *zikui*, bringing merit. *Rav Shteinman* taught – go where you are needed most, where your contribution will have the greatest impact. It is not all about numbers. It is about reaching out and helping our brothers and sisters wherever they are.

In the last few years, the clarion call for minorities has been that their "lives matter." In our own religious camp, with its diversity of backgrounds, the opportunity for outreach is often determined by numbers. Is it worth my time to travel to a small town to teach a group of Jews, or should I devote my talents to the larger community? Does the prisoner incarcerated for a serious crime deserve the same attention as the Jew: living in a fine Jewish community, going to *shul* and doing all of the "right" things? I think so, because it is not about numbers. In the city there are, *baruch Hashem*, many talented *talmidei chachamim* who are available to teach. Communities that have prisons are usually a couple of hours drive from the bastions of Torah. An added disadvantage is that the people living in small, distant communities or incarcerated in prison are not as *geshmak*,

pleasant, pleasing, edifying, stimulating (I can go on, but I believe the reader understands.) It all depends on why we go, and for whom: is it for ourselves; or for Hashem?

One of the legendary *mezakah es ha'rabim* was *Horav Aryeh Levin, zl*, an individual who earned the appellation *Tzaddik* of Yerushalayim, warranted the respect of all Jews – both observant and those not yet observant; he was progenitor for generations of *gedolei Yisrael*. He was officially the *Mashgiach* of *Eitz Chaim Yeshivah*, but his distinction came from his outreach to the chronically ill patients who were quarantined due to the contagious nature of their illness, and for his extraordinary care, love and outreach to the Jewish prisoners incarcerated under the British Mandate. To quote a prisoner, “His eyes illuminated the darkness of our cells... for he was a bridge to the past generations, a link of prayer with the Almighty.”

In 1965, timed to coincide with *Rav Aryeh's* eightieth birthday, a group of veteran resistance fighters – dating back to the Mandate period – gathered together with their families in the courtyard of the old central prison to pay tribute to the man who meant so much to them – without whom they would not be here today – both spiritually and physically. *Rav Aryeh* rose to say a few words: “The significance of this assembly is that it has brought friends together... It particularly makes my heart glad to see the families of the prisoners, especially the young children, since I have always loved small children.” He stopped for a moment, then added, “I do not know if I will be privileged to be with you again like this. All I ask is that you tell your children: ‘There was an old Jew in Yerushalayim who loved us very much.’” With that, he burst into tears, and, among the thousands of people assembled in his honor, not a dry eye was to be found.

Rav Aryeh resuscitated these men, giving them a new lease on physical life, while introducing them to the life of the spirit. He did this with love – a love that was reciprocated. It was not only the prisoners who benefitted from his extraordinary, selfless love. It was the lepers living in the leper hospital – twelve Jewish patients surrounded by 300 Arab lepers. *Rav Aryeh* was not permitted to make physical contact with them; thus, he merely sat there and read from the *Chumash* with *Rashi's* commentary, explaining the laws, giving insight into the narrative and making the Torah come alive to these Jews who themselves were more dead than alive.

The living conditions were subhuman, filled with morass and neglect. He became involved in the lives of the patients, gave them hope filled with love. He sought kosher food for them, with his *rebbetzin* preparing the meals that he carried to them. He did not fear the contagious nature of the disease, because “those on their way to perform a *mitzvah* are not harmed.” He did not reach the “masses.” He did not make tapes, write books, have an internet site. He reached the few that no one was interested in reaching. His idea of *zikui ha'rabim* was to act on behalf of those in need – who have little hope of having someone reach out to them. He was real, placing the needs of his beneficiaries above his own.