

Only by lot shall the land be divided; according to the names of the tribes of the father shall they receive it as a possession. According to lot, shall their inheritance be apportioned to them, with due regard for whether they are many or few. (26:55,56)

The land was divided by a system which clearly treats the land as an estate left by the preceding generation, the *yotzei Mitzrayim*, Jews who participated in the Egyptian exodus. Each of the fathers of those who left Egypt was designated to receive a portion in the Holy Land equivalent to the number of grandsons twenty years of age and older who would eventually enter *Eretz Yisrael*. This estate could be inherited only by those of the sons who were more than twenty years old when they left Egypt. These sons, in turn, could bequeath the land to those of their own sons who would be more than twenty years old at the time that they entered the Land.

Horav S.R. Hirsch, zl, suggests that two distinct lessons can be derived from the land register of the Jewish nation. First and foremost, we see that whatever Hashem promises is “money in the bank.” It is so certain to be fulfilled that it must be regarded as an accomplished fact, a “done deal.” This included not only those who had already been liberated and stood at the threshold of the Holy Land; but even those who still languished beneath the yoke of the Egyptian taskmasters were to be regarded as the owners of the land promised to them by Hashem. Indeed, they already had legal rights assigned to their descendants accordingly. Hashem’s word is enduring. Therefore, *halachah* views *Eretz Yisrael* as *muchzak*, property already owned by the fathers. It is not merely *raui*, property entitled by law. It was already theirs. Consequently, a *b’chor*, firstborn, was to receive a double portion in the apportionment of the Land.

Second, we learn a critical lesson concerning the relationship between parents and children and grandparents and grandchildren, and the overriding influence that the older generation has on the younger. Parents’ and grandparents’ most precious acquisitions are children and grandchildren who remain adherents to the faith of their ancestors. Children and grandchildren who maintain fidelity to their heritage bear witness to the merits of its forebears and even atone for their shortcomings. After all, they cannot be all that bad if they have produced such progeny. Good and honest children and grandchildren are a credit to their forebears.

Notwithstanding all of the trials and tribulations suffered in Egypt, the Jewish spirit was not broken. It was not for a lack of trying, but the Egyptians failed, and 600,000 able-bodied men over the age of twenty years old were worthy of redemption and prepared to accept the spiritual yoke of Heaven Above. This reality was proven again forty years later when, despite all of the aberrations and attrition of travel in the wilderness, 600,000 were found deserving of entering the Land. How did they do it? What catalyzed such strength of character?

Rav Hirsch explains that all of this was the result of the spirit which the ancestors nurtured in their children – even while they slaved in the Egyptian bondage. Each plot of G-d's land which the grandchildren received, they humbly placed, in spirit, at the feet of their grandfathers: “*Zaidy*, this is yours. This is your conquest. You earned it.” The grandchildren would receive this as their inheritance following the passing of their father.

The sons were given the land only *b'zchus*, as heirs of their fathers and bearers of their names. We see from here that, notwithstanding the father's error that had cost them their own right to enter the land, their children received it instead. Why? These same fathers had their shortcomings, but, nonetheless, they inculcated the correct and proper spirit in the new generation. “We made mistakes, but you will enter the land with pristine faith.” It was not just a few who “made it,” but 600,000 men over the age of twenty years old stood ready to enter the land. This was an achievement of unparalleled proportion.

This proves that the fathers understood how to atone for their own failing through their children. Indeed, the mere fact that an entire generation was considered worthy of entering the land on account of their ancestors' merit shows how great the merit of that first generation was. Thus, on the whole, the image of *Klal Yisrael* wandering through the wilderness, with all of their lapses, is still to be considered a worthy one.

This is a lesson that contemporary Judaism should learn. Yes, it might be late and even difficult for parents to alter their chosen lifestyle, but give your children a chance. Do not deprive them of their heritage! They deserve better than watered-down Judaism that, at best, represents nothing more than a cultural affiliation, not a religious bond. Indeed, what you do for your children might ultimately become your own eternal lifeline.