

## Five of you will pursue a hundred, and a hundred of you will pursue ten thousand. (26:8)

*Rashi* notes the discrepancy in the ratio of five to one hundred. If five Jews can pursue one hundred, which is a ratio of one to twenty, then a hundred Jews should pursue two thousand – not more. Yet, the Torah states that one hundred will pursue ten thousand. This teaches that when more people are united in serving Hashem, the effectiveness of their actions increase exponentially. The same Reuven and Shimon who had earlier been pursuing one hundred are now able to achieve much more. They have not changed, but their power has, because they are part of a *tzibbur*, community/group.

In his closing remarks to *Shemiras HaLashon*, the **Chafetz Chaim, zl**, quotes this *Chazal* in his emphasis of the extreme importance of *tefillah b'tzibbur*, communal prayer, as opposed to private prayer at home. He explains that not only does one increase his personal reward by *davening* with a *minyan*, quorum, of at least ten men, but his actual prayer has greater efficacy. He employs a simple rationale. If a person has before him two business propositions; one which could bring him a profit of five dollars and one that will incur a profit which is quadruple that – is there any question which one he will choose?

While this thesis focuses on *tefillah b'tzibbur*, it applies equally to all *mitzvos* in which a multitude of people enhance the *mitzvah*. Furthermore, as the *Chafetz Chaim* concludes, the three dominant *mitzvos* associated with *tefillah*: donning *Tefillin*; *Krias Shema*; remembering the exodus from Egypt – are all embellished when a person *davens b'tzibbur*.

One's inclusion in a group can have both positive and negative consequences. In *Sefer Bamidbar* 1:49, the Torah repeats a number of times that *Shevet Levi* was not counted together with the rest of the nation. *Rashi* explains that Hashem foresaw that one day a Heavenly decree would be issued against those twenty years of age and above, that they all perish in the wilderness. By excluding the Tribe of Levi from the communal census, they were no longer part of the *Klal*, the larger community, and, hence, not subject to the effects of the decree. When a punishment is issued against a group, all members of the group, regardless of personal merit, are included. While there are exceptions to the rule – they are to be viewed as such.

The inclusion of an individual in a communal group likewise plays itself out in a positive manner. Thus, we find that, when Elisha *HaNavi* asked the Shunamis woman if she needed any favors, her reply was, *bsoch ami anochi yosheves*, “Among my people I dwell” (*Melachim* II 4:13). The *Zohar Hakadosh* explains that this dialogue occurred on *Rosh Hashanah*, and Elisha was intimating, “Do you seek any preferential treatment from the Almighty?” She replied, “I wish to be included as a member of the community.” She did not want to be singled out as an individual. **Horav Chaim Shmuelwitz, zl**, explains that one who is judged as part of the community enjoys the same benefits that are granted to the community – regardless of lack of punishment.

This, comments the *Rosh Yeshivah*, is also the basis for the admonition of *Chazal*, “A person should always associate himself with the community” (*Berachos* 30a). *Rashi* explains this to mean that one’s prayers should be articulated in the plural, rather than the singular, form. By praying for the public welfare, one is automatically included with them. Therefore, he does not require personal merit in order to benefit from his personal prayers. The reason for this, explains *Rav Chaim*, is that the community is not viewed merely as a collection of individuals, but rather, as a new entity exceeding the aggregate of the merits and strengths of the individuals of which it is comprised.

The incredible inclusive power manifest by the community is underscored by *Chazal* when they advise us: *Im paga bach menuvel zeh, mashcheihu l'bais ha'medrash*, “If this despicable (abominable) one (the *yetzer hora*, evil inclination) meets you (if he begins bothering you), draw him into the study hall” (*Kedushin* 30b). The *bais ha'medrash* is the communal Torah center, the place where many gather to study Torah individually – and collectively – all under one roof. It is there that the “despicable one” is powerless to dominate over a person. Thus, explains *Rav Chaim*, the best advice is for a person to unite with the community, remain steadfastly committed to being part of the *klal*, for the merit of the *rabim*, multitude, will encompass and benefit all who are found there.

*Klal*, community, is determined by *daas Torah*, the wisdom developed by those whose entire lives are steeped in Torah study and erudition. It takes a mind honed by Torah to develop such an acute perspective that one sees what eludes others. *Horav Elazar M. Shach, zl*, relates that when **Horav Meir Simchah, zl**, of *Dvinsk*, author of the *Or Sameach* and *Meshech Chochmah*, became gravely ill with his final illness, another distinguished *Rav* wanted to send telegrams to every Jewish community and leader to recite *Tehillim* for the *Or Sameach*. The *Or Sameach* demurred and resisted efforts at disseminating his need for communal prayer. He explained that, as long as people consider him to be part of the large communal collective, he is part of the wider community. Once his illness is publicized, and he becomes the exclusive subject of prayer, he will be judged differently. He felt that this would intensify the critical and grave nature of his illness.

The *Chafetz Chaim* proposes another reason for the importance of praying with a *minyan*, the incredible reward in store for answering *Amen*, *Borchu*, and *Amen*, *Yehei Shmei Rabba*, with all of his *kochos*, might: all of his sins are forgiven. Imagine atonement for all of our sins, and all that is expected of us is to *daven* with passion, and answer *Amen* as if we mean it.

Regrettably, we do not acknowledge the importance of answering *Amen* to *Kaddish*, and blessings in general. As a result, we either ignore the blessing, or answer *Amen* half-heartedly. Clearly, our reluctance to “do it right” is due to a lack of awareness of the overriding significance of *tefillah b'tzibur*. The following episode was related by the *Levush*, *Horav Mordechai Yoffe, zl*, who went to learn Torah from a great *Sephardic gadol*, Torah leader, whose name was Rabbi Abohav. Once, Rabbi Abohav’s son made a *bracha*, and Rabbi Yoffe, for some reason, did not answer *Amen*. Rabbi Abohav became so angry with his student that he put him in *cherem*, excommunicated him. When the prodigious student looked at his *Rebbe* with a stunned image, the *Rebbe* told him the

following story which depicts the severe punishment one receives for neglecting to answer *Amen*. Perhaps if he “listened” to the story, he would understand why his *Rebbe* was exceedingly careful about answering *Amen* properly.

Prior to the Spanish Inquisition and eventual expulsion of 1492, Spain was replete with a number of holy Jewish communities. The king had a number of times attempted to free himself and his community from the Jews, but, due to the efforts of a pious Jew whom the king admired, the Jews had always been spared. Following the latest edict calling for the Jews’ expulsion from Spain, the community leaders once again approached this righteous fellow and implored him to intercede on their behalf. He, of course, agreed, but asked to first *daven Minchah*. They persuaded him to go immediately, since it was a matter of life or death.

The king was pleased to see his friend, and they began to talk about the decree. Meanwhile, a priest entered the king’s office and immediately began to bless the king in Latin. It was a lengthy litany, so the Jew saw an opportunity to move to the side and *daven Minchah*. Regrettably, the priest concluded his blessing while the Jew was still reciting *Shemoneh Esrai*. The priest called upon all those assembled to answer *Amen* to his blessing of the king. Everyone responded except for the pious Jew, who was answering to a Higher Authority. When the priest saw that the Jew had not affirmed his blessing with a resounding *Amen*, he went into a frenzy. He screamed that now his blessing of the king would not be fulfilled, because someone had not responded with *Amen*.

Hearing this, the king also became infuriated and ordered that the Jew immediately be put to death and his body be mutilated and quartered and sent to his home. He then expelled all of the Jews from his kingdom. Why? Why did this Jew receive such a terrible death? Why were all the Jews exiled? One of the closest friends of the deceased fasted to be allowed to know what sin it was that catalyzed this gruesome punishment. The dead Jew appeared to his friend in a dream and explained that once he had neglected to say *Amen* to a child’s *brachah*. Until then, the Heavenly Court had set aside his punishment. When the priest became angry over his not saying *Amen* to his blessing, the Heavenly Tribunal decided to prosecute him and sentenced him to this horrible death. *Rav Abohav* concluded the story, saying, “I will forgive you if you will publicize the story and warn everyone to be meticulous concerning answering *Amen*.”

In *Sparks of Glory*, *Rabbi Moshe Prager, zl*, relates the poignant story of a young boy named Shmulik. His father risked his life daily to pray with a secret makeshift *minyan* in a basement, in Warsaw. Shmulik, too, wanted to attend the *minyan*. His father flatly refused. It was too dangerous. It meant putting everyone at risk. There could only be so many people there. As the “congregation” was praying, they heard a soft knock at the door. They had established a code, which was a series of knocks. This knock did not fit with the code. With great trepidation and fear, they slowly opened the door – prepared for the worst. All they saw was little Shmulik. When Shmulik’s father saw his young child at the door, he became quite upset, and he screamed, “What are you doing here? I told you never to come here! Why did you disobey my orders?” The father then proceeded to slap Shmulik across the face.

Shmulik held his own and cried out, "Will you beat me, too? Have I not had my share of blows? I, too, am a Jew. I, too, want to pray!"

I included this story, so that the next time we are in our warm beds, too lazy to get up for *minyan*, or at home at night and too "busy" to go to *Minchah/Maariv*, perhaps we will think about the Jews who, throughout the ages, risked their lives to *daven* with a *minyan*. Let us not forget Shmulik's clarion call, "We, too, are Jews!"