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Rise From The Dust

I have been privileged to be the Co-Regional Director of NCSY Israel since its founding over 5 years ago. Over these years, I have met and gotten to know hundreds of wonderful teen olim throughout all of Israel, and have seen many of their lives changed.

There is a story of one teen that stands out for me. As is known, one of the highlights of NCSY internationally is the ‘Shabbaton experience’ and the highlight of each Shabbaton for many of the participants is “ebbing,” the meditative singing and listening to words of inspiration just as the Shabbat comes to a close. It happened that a teen who has been in our program for years and had responded coldly to religious inspiration, came over to me, after ebbing, with watery eyes and a smile from ear to ear, and simply said, “Thank you.” I asked him, “What did it for you? What words inspired you? What song moved you?” He responded, “Just being a part of something, it reminds me that I matter.”

The Midrash Shmuel writes that most

of Chapter 5 of Pirkei Avot is centered on the number 10. In six Mishnayot the chapter presents historical events of which there are 10: the ten utterances in which the world was created, the ten generations from Adam to Noach, the ten tests of Avraham, etc. The Maharal in many places stresses that the number ten is the only complete unit because, he says, there is no number larger than ten. After ten, we return to one (10+1, etc.). Therefore, any number less than 10 is lacking or incomplete, since there is the potential for more. According to the Maharal, this is the reason why a minyan is made up of ten or more. Hashem, who is the ultimate in perfection and completeness, wants His holy prayers to be associated with that which best represents perfection and completeness, the number 10.

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The Lubavitcher Rebbe points out that all of the examples of 10 described in Chapter 5 ultimately relate to the physical. He also points out that there is one important example of 10 missing: the

Ten Commandments. In its laws, the Ten Commandments represent all the laws of the Torah and the study of it. Chapter Six of Pirkei Avot, its final chapter, specifically discusses the greatness of Torah and offers teachings related to it. The Rebbe further explains that the Ten Commandments, and thus the Torah at large, transcend the physical. Not only do they transcend the physical, they also have the ability to elevate it. This teaches us that anything physical has the ability to be elevated beyond itself by bringing Hashem's Torah and wisdom to it. This is the power of the Torah, and even more so, with a minyan. As the saying goes, "Nine kings don't make a minyan, but ten farmers do."

The teen who came to me, moved more than he ever thought he would be, may not have even realized why he was so touched. However, he felt complete when he was part of a minyan, and with other people wanting the same goal of connection to Hashem. The Tefilah of the songs and the Torah of the words of inspiration, mixed with the power of Shabbat, gave him the ability to elevate himself, to transcend his physical being and realize he is much more than dust. In these challenging times, may we all find the ability to transcend our physical selves and realize our infinite potential. ■

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