

From The Rabbi



The signature prayer in the Rosh Hashanah Musaf Service is based on the following words that are part of a Mishnah on page 18a of the Babylonian Talmud:

**ON ROSH HASHANAH ALL THE WORLD'S INHABITANTS
PASS BEFORE G-D LIKE B'NEI MARON.**

The phrase *B'nei Maron* is purposely not translated because it is a phrase that is unusual and needs an explanation. The Gemara that expands upon this Mishnah asks the question: What is the meaning of “**like b'nei maron**”? The Gemara offers these three possibilities:

1. Here in Babylonia, we translate this phrase to mean “**LIKE SHEEP**”

Rashi's commentary on this is:

When sheep are counted for tithing, they are let out one at a time through a door too small for two to go out together.

2. Reish Lakish who is from Israel said it means: “**LIKE THE PEOPLE TRAVERSING THE ELEVATED PATHS OF THE MARON AREA.**”

Rashi's commentary on this is:

In the Maron area, there was a road with a steep drop on both sides. The road itself was so narrow that two people could not walk side by side upon it. Thus, people walked upon this path one after the other.

3. Rabbi Yehudah said in the name of Shmuel (like b'nei Maron means):

“**LIKE THE SOLDIERS OF THE HOUSE OF DAVID**”

Rashi's commentary on this is:

*According to this explanation the term **MARON** is related to **MARUT** which means authority. David's soldiers were counted one at a time as they walked out to war in single file.*

Rashi emphasizes that each of the explanations offered by the Gemara are simply different ways of saying the *same thing* which is:

**ON ROSH HASHANAH WE ALL PASS BEFORE GOD
ONE BY ONE AS UNIQUE INDIVIDUALS**

However, each of the interpretations of *b'nei maron* can be understood to be referring to a different aspect of an individual's life.

If we **pass before God like sheep**, then we pass by as unique individuals who are also a part of the larger community. The word sheep is both a singular and a plural noun. If we are as sheep, then we are both one and many at the same time. Therefore, this interpretation should urge us to think about our identity as individuals and as part of the community in which we live. As we ponder what it means to be like *b'nei maron*, we should be pondering how much our identity is shaped by the community in which we live and our role within it.

If we pass before God like **individuals who have climbed up onto an elevated path**, then we should take some time to ponder how much are we climbing and striving to reach a higher ground. Are we satisfied with the status quo in our lives or are we striving to reach higher heights?

If we pass before God like **soldiers in the army of King David**, then we should be asking ourselves, “For what am I willing to fight? Do I have any wounds from the righteous battles in which I have been engaged?”

When we reach this prayer in the Rosh Hashanah service and are stirred by its haunting melody and profound poetry, may it be a time when we stand as unique individuals with a keen awareness of and gratitude for our unbreakable bond with the members of our synagogue family. May it be a time when we evaluate the level of our striving to reach higher heights, and may it be a time of strengthening our commitment to the battles that are worth fighting.

May we all be inscribed for good year!

L'shanah Tovah Tikateivu!

Rabbi Gordon Yaffe