

# UNITE!

by Rabbi Yaakov Menken

*"...I cannot carry you alone; HaShem your G-d has caused you to multiply, and behold, today you are like the stars of Heaven in multitude... how can I alone carry your toil, your burden and your argument?"*  
[1:9-10, 12]

What was Moshe telling the Nation? Why was it that he needed assistants, judges for each tribe?

Let us look, first, at what Moshe was called upon to bear: "your toil, your burden and your argument." The Ramban (Nachmanides) explains that the "toil" was the constant effort required to teach the Nation Torah, while the "burden" was the responsibility to pray for the needs of each person who was in any sort of painful situation, during his conversations with G-d. The "argument" was, of course, the obligation to judge and resolve any arguments.

Rav Shamshon Raphael Hirsch looks at the first two more generally: "toil" referred to strenuous activity, while the "burden" was enduring things which required patience.

On the third, however, he agrees with the Ramban's view. The last item, on which we generally say "the last is most important," was the need for Moshe to resolve disputes. "When 'your argument,' the individual personal quarrels were added to the list which Moses by himself had to settle, it became more than the strength of even a Moses could bear" says Rav Hirsch.

The Afikei Yehudah offers an insight into Moshe's words a few verses earlier, which adds another layer of depth to this point. "HaShem your G-d has caused you to multiply, and behold, today you are like the stars of Heaven in multitude." Israel is compared to the sand of the sea, and the stars of Heaven. Grains of sand are found together, resting on each other, while each star is (and must be) distant from others. Israel is called "a stiff-necked people" -- but if they are united, then it is still possible to lead them all. But they are extremely difficult to bear when they are separate and divided from each other. And this is what Moshe said: "I cannot carry you alone," because "HaShem your G-d has caused you to multiply;" and not only this, but "today you are like the stars of Heaven," separated and divided between yourselves like the stars. In that situation, "how can I alone carry your toil, your burden and your argument?"

There is, as well, a connection between our reading, and the Ninth of Av -- besides the calendar connection, in that Devarim precedes the Ninth of Av every year. The verse, "how can I alone carry...", begins with the Hebrew word "Eichah." This is also the first word in the Book of Lamentations, the

Biblical book mourning the destruction of Jerusalem, which is read on the Ninth. In fact, if you look in a chumash, a printed book of the Torah, you will see a small word "sheni" [second] next to "Eichah" -- an indicator that this begins the second reading of this week. But universally, you will find that readers complete the first reading one verse early, specifically in order to avoid beginning the second reading with "Eichah."

Just as Moshe said "Eichah" because the people were divided, we say "Eichah" because we are divided. The Second Temple was destroyed, say our Sages, specifically because of needless hatred.

It can involve a lot of toil to deal with the Jewish nation. And it can require patience to handle the burden. But it is when we are divided, when there are arguments, that it becomes unbearable.

What is the solution, besides simply toning down our rhetoric? One answer comes if we look at the behavior of sand. By themselves, grains of sand will lie on each other, but they will not cluster. Only if you add water do the individual grains of sand congeal. And, of course, Rebbe Akiva compared Torah to the waters of the sea!

Torah is the agent which can reunite Jews who are independent, divided stars, as congealed grains of sand. And together, we can build the ultimate sand castle.... a Temple of gold and stone.

Good Shabbos,

Rabbi Yaakov Menken