

Parshat Shlach – The Few that are Many

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The Mishna in Megillah records a series of religious practices that require ten men (Minyan) to be performed.¹ Included in the list are reading the Torah, Birkat Kohanim, Kaddish, Kedusha, Barchu, items that are otherwise known as Devarim Sh'b'Kedusha (דברים שבקדושה) or expressions of sanctity.² The Gemara then queries as to the source of the Mishna's contention that ten men are essential for creating a Minyan. In response, Rabbi Yochanan references to the verse in Parshat Emor,³ "and I will be sanctified **amongst** Bnei Yisrael (ונקדשתי בתוך בני ישראל)" which he claims asserts that "any expression of holiness should not be recited in a quorum of fewer than ten." Perplexed by the response, the Gemara inquires as to from where in the verse can this be inferred. Rabbi Chiya responds that it requires a series of linguistic parallels (גזירות שוות) to reach the conclusion proposed by Rabbi Yochanan. First, one connects the verse in Emor to a verse in Parshat Korach from the common word "**amongst** (בתוך)" – in Emor it says "**amongst** Bnei Yisrael" and in Korach it says, "separate away from **amongst** this **congregation** (הבדלו מתוך העדה הזאת)." ⁴ Then it requires an additional linguistic parallel from that Pasuk in Korach to Parshat Shlach with the recurrent word "**congregation** (עדה)" – in Korach it says, "separate away from **amongst** this **congregation**" and in Shlach it says about the spies who slander the Land of Israel, "how long shall I bear this evil **congregation** (עד מתי לעדה הרעה הזאת)." ⁵ Since the evil spies numbered ten, the transitive property of linguistic parallels leads to Rabbi Yochanan's contention that any expression of holiness requires a quorum of ten men or a Minyan. Leaving aside the complexity of the derivation, it is seemingly unimaginable, maybe even an anathema, that this is the source for a Minyan. **Of all the possible inferences, how could it be that Chazal chose the incident of the evil speaking Meraglim⁷ and the rebellion of Korach as the paradigm for the pinnacle of communal worship and expressions of holiness (דברים שבקדושה). It seems completely counterintuitive.**

Parshat Shlach and Korach are replete with the word "**congregation** (עדה)." If one were to survey all the occurrences of the term throughout the two Parshiot, it would yield an ambiguity as to what exactly the word is referencing or describing;⁸ in many instances, the commentaries disagree with

respect to the antecedent. In order to gain a better understanding of this phenomenon, it is worthwhile to take a deeper look at a couple of examples. The most prominent illustration of this vagueness is the Pasuk that we quoted above found in Parshat Korach.

במדבר פרק טז

- (כ) וַיְדַבֵּר יְקוֹק אֶל-מֹשֶׁה וְאֶל-אַהֲרֹן לֵאמֹר:
 (כא) הַבְּדִילוּ מִתּוֹךְ הָעֵדָה הַזֹּאת וְאֲכֹלָה אֹתָם כְּרָגֶעַךְ:
 (כב) וַיִּפְּלוּ עַל-פְּנֵיהֶם וַיֹּאמְרוּ אֶל אֱלֹהֵי הַרְוֹחֵת לְכָל-בָּשָׂר
 הָאִישׁ אֶחָד יִחַטָּא וְעַל כָּל-הָעֵדָה תִּקְרָץ: פ
 (כג) וַיְדַבֵּר יְקוֹק אֶל-מֹשֶׁה לֵאמֹר:
 (כד) דַּבֵּר אֶל-הָעֵדָה לֵאמֹר הֵעֵלוּ מִסְבִּיב לְמִשְׁכַּן-קְרַח דָּתָן
 וְאַבִּירָם:

At the climax of Korach's rebellion, God commands Moshe and Aharon to distance themselves from the **congregation**, so that He can annihilate them in a moment. Moshe and Aharon beseech God that he should not take his wrath out on the entire **congregation** because of the sin of one individual. Then God instructs Moshe to tell the **congregation** to distance themselves from the encampment of Korach. The last manifestation of the word **congregation** (כד) clearly refers to the greater Bnei Yisrael who are being told to isolate Korach physically by separating themselves from him and his entourage. Moshe and Aharon's request to spare the **congregation** from the wrath of God (כב) also clearly refers to Bnei Yisrael because their plea (remiscent of Avraham in Sdom) is that how could God punish the entire **congregation** for the misdeeds of an individual. If that is true, then it would stand to reason that the first instance of **congregation** (כא) is also referencing Bnei Yisrael and it would suggest that God was telling Moshe to withdraw himself from the people so that God could annihilate the entire nation. The Rabbeinu Chananel sees this explanation as being untenable because as Moshe later claims what did Bnei Yisrael do wrong, they were not challenging God, so why would they be the objects of God's anger? He, therefore, suggests that God is instructing Moshe and Aharon to distance themselves from Korach's cabal. Moshe misunderstood God's instruction as referencing the entire nation and God responds by clarifying that he was specifically speaking about Korach's faction. Before this cluster of Pesukim, the word **congregation** (עדה) is used to both describe Bnei Yisrael as well as the participants in Korach's insurrection. That ambiguity makes it hard to know for certain what **congregation** God is referencing and could easily

¹ גמרא מגילה כג:

² עיין רש"י שם וגם גמרא ברכות כא: מנין שאין היחיד אומר קדושה... וגם סנהדרין ב. ועד:

³ וְלֹא תִחַלְלוּ אֶת-שֵׁם קִדְשִׁי וְנִקְדַּשְׁתִּי בַתּוֹךְ בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל אֲנִי יְקוֹק מְקַדְשֶׁם (ויקרא כב, לב)

⁴ הַבְּדִילוּ מִתּוֹךְ הָעֵדָה הַזֹּאת וְאֲכֹלָה אֹתָם כְּרָגֶעַךְ (במדבר טז, כא)

⁵ עַד-מִתֵּי לַעֲדָה הָרְעָה הַזֹּאת אֲשֶׁר הִמָּה מְלִיגִים עָלַי אֶת-תְּלִצוֹת בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל אֲשֶׁר הִמָּה מְלִיגִים עָלַי שְׁמַעֲתִי (במדבר יד, כז)

⁶ עיין בראשית רבה צא, ג למקור מבני יעקב.

⁷ עיין אג"מ או"ח ח"א סי' כג וחי"ט סי' יד שלומד מהמרגלים שכופר מצטרף למנין עשרה

⁸ גיסי מנחם חריש האיר עיני בראשונה לבעייה הזאת

explain Moshe's confusion as to who God was referencing. The Ramban takes issue with the Rach's assertion that the **congregation** must refer to Korach and his compatriots because why would God refer to three people (Korach, Datan, Aviram) as a **congregation**? In addition, Bnei Yisrael were not currently gathered around the tents of these parties that would require Moshe coaxing them to distance themselves. Moshe and Aharon at that moment were by the Ohel Mo'ed with the 250 men who were going to burn the incense before God. So the more plausible explanation would be that God was telling them to separate themselves from the nation rather than Korach. He suggests that the people were culpable because they were swayed by Korach's arguments. In gathering to see what God would say about his claims, they thereby became silent partners in his insurrection. This would be parallel with a similar incident that transpires immediately after Korach's rebellion where God takes the entire Bnei Yisrael to task for complaining about His elimination of Korach and his co-conspirators.⁹ The Ramban later refines his position by suggesting that maybe the entire **congregation** (כל העדה) refers to the leaders of the tribes or the first-borns.¹⁰ Why would the Torah use such an imprecise term like **congregation** which can be interpreted in so many different ways?

Another example of this opacity is similarly found in the verse previously quoted from Parshat Shlach.

במדבר פרק יד

(כז) עַד־מַתִּי לְעֵדָה הָרַעָה הַזֹּאת אֲשֶׁר הִמָּה מְלִינִים עָלַי אֶת־תְּלֻזֹת בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל אֲשֶׁר הִמָּה מְלִינִים עָלַי שְׁמַעְתִּי: (לה) אֲנִי יְקוּקֶה דְבַרְתִּי אִם־לֹא זֹאת אַעֲשֶׂה לְכָל־הָעֵדָה הָרַעָה הַזֹּאת הַנוֹעֲדִים עָלַי בַּמִּדְבָּר הַזֶּה יִתְמוּ וְשָׁם יָמָתוּ: (לו) וְהָאֲנָשִׁים אֲשֶׁר־שָׁלַח מֹשֶׁה לְתוֹר אֶת־הָאָרֶץ וַיֵּשְׁבוּ <וַיִּלּוּנוּ> עָלָיו אֶת־כָּל־הָעֵדָה לְהוֹצִיא דָבָר עַל־הָאָרֶץ:

God bemoans this terrible **congregation** that is complaining and muttering against Him. Later, God promises that this wicked **congregation** will certainly perish in the desert and then closes with condemning the spies who caused the entire **congregation** to protest because they slandered the Land. In the final instance (לו), it is clear that the **congregation** is the broader nation because it is speaking of the negative influence that the Meraglim had on the disposition of Bnei Yisrael. The previous mention (לה) speaks of an evil **congregation** that will perish in the desert which once again seems to refer to the broader nation since it is in concert with the punishment meted out by God to that generation

(20 and older). Given its context, the terrible **congregation** noted in the initial verse quoted (כז) would at first glance seem to match the description in the subsequent citation (עדה הרעה הזאת) and therefore would also be associated with Bnei Yisrael as a whole. That is bolstered by the fact that the ensuing verses speak about the punishment that God intends for the nation. Most of the commentaries though (and Chazal)¹¹ interpret the first **congregation** mentioned (כז) as referring to the Meraglim because the verse continues with the causative verb (מלינים), they engendered complaining against God which matches with the description of the spies found in the final verse (לו) quoted above. Prior to this mention of the **congregation** (כז), the word **congregation** is only used in reference to the entire Bnei Yisrael.¹¹ Here too, why is the Torah opting to use an ambiguous term like **congregation** (עדה) rather than a more exact noun?

A third example of this imprecision is found at the tail end of Parshat Shlach in the Torah's description of the sacrifice brought when the majority of the nation has unintentionally engaged in idol worship (שעיר לע"ז).¹²

במדבר פרק טו

(כד) וְהָיָה אִם מֵעֵינֵי הָעֵדָה נַעֲשֶׂתָה לְשִׁגְגָה וְעָשׂוּ כָל־הָעֵדָה פֶּר־בֶּן־בְּקָר אֶחָד לְעֹלָה לְרִיחַ לַיהוָה וּמִנְחָתוֹ וּנְסֻכּוֹ כַּמִּשְׁפָּט וּשְׁעִיר־עִזִּים אֶחָד לְחַטָּת:

If the iniquity was committed unwittingly (literally because of the eyes of the **congregation**), through the inadvertence of the **congregation**, the whole **congregation** shall bring...a he-goat as a sin-offering. The simple reading of the verse implies that there was a congregational error committed that requires communal atonement for the sin. On the other hand, Chazal¹³ and many commentaries explain the phrase "from the eyes of the **congregation** (מעיני העדה) as referring to the Supreme Court (בית דין הגדול) and not to the nation as a whole. The truth is that they bifurcate the Pasuk by indicating that the mistake was made by the Supreme Court (an improper decision was rendered בשגגה...העדה) while the infraction was committed by the **congregation** as a whole (העדה נעשתה). Once again here, one is left perplexed as to why the Torah would use such a vague term that can both be interpreted to mean the entire nation or the representatives of the nation rather than clarifying each parties' role.

⁹ במדבר יז, ו- הרמו מתוך העדה הזאת ואכלה אותם כרגע ויפלו על פניהם
¹⁰ עיין בסוף הרמב"ן ויקרא טז, כא על פסוק יט ויקהל עליהם קרח את כל העדה... וגם
 באבן עזרא יז, ו וגם ברמב"ן יז, י
¹¹ אפשר לטעון שהמלה "כל" היא המנחה פה את פירוש "עדה" להיות כל העם והפעם
 היחידה בפסוק כז שלא השתמש בתאר "כל" פי' עדה היא עדת המרגלים. אבל
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 התמיה שאנו מציגים
¹² במדבר טו, כב-כו
¹³ עיין הוריות ה: וברש"י במדבר טו, כד

The answer to all these questions might be that the Torah is intentionally using terminology that can conflate the leaders with the congregation. It implies that the Torah sees collective responsibility when it comes to national or leadership issues. This is based on the principle of Chazal that anyone who has the power to intervene and thwart wrongdoing, but instead opts to remain silent or passive, they will be punished for that iniquity.¹⁴ Silence is acquiescence. A symbiotic bilateral relationship exists between a congregation and its true or adopted leaders. Authority can be conferred and leaders can be empowered by their constituents both explicitly and implicitly. In the case of the Meraglim, the vocal cry of the nation to turn back to Egypt was an explicit endorsement of their slanderous claims about the Land and God's inability to bring them into Eretz Yisrael. When the people concurred with the claims of the spies, they sanctioned their "leadership" and became indiscernible from the spies themselves. That conflation is presented by the Torah utilizing the ambiguous term **congregation** (עדה) which implies no differentiation between the initiating Meraglim and the accessory nation and they therefore met the same end. In the case of Korach and his partners, a vocal minority was empowered by a silent majority. The people did not explicitly condone the rebellion but their interest was piqued by his claims and that resulted in them becoming spectators to the showdown between Moshe and Korach. Had the nation dismissed his claims from the outset, Korach's insurrection would have withered away from the weight of disinterest. On the other hand, the nation's presence at such a spectacle added fuel to the fire and gave Korach a sense of enablement from the implicit support of an audience. Here too, the Torah conflates the **congregation** as a whole with the **congregation** of Korach because their unspoken encouragement made them partners in his rebellion.¹⁵ Once again here, God sees the nation and Korach as being indistinguishable. In order to save themselves, God instructs whoever wants to register their disaffection to separate away from this **congregation** (הבדלו הזאת העדה). It could have been Moshe and Aharon walking away from the nation or the nation walking away from Korach. The latter prevailed and only Korach and his partners were punished. That was until the people start to cry over the loss of their fellow members, who Moshe and Aharon had "killed", once again making the **congregation** partners with the **congregation** of Korach. And here too they meet the same fate as Korach when a plague strikes the nation until Aharon intervenes

with the incense to take an active stand against the sins of the people's commission. This same concept can be applied to the congregation's idol worship sin offering. The leaders are a reflection of the people and the people are a reflection of their leadership. Each one enables the other and therefore they are partners in their missteps.

All that is a wonderful explanation of the usage of the term **congregation** (עדה) in these Parshiot, but it only serves to further the question as to why Chazal chose such a negative source as the derivation for a Minyan. If one takes a step back and reflects on the concept of **Eida**, it might actually be the essence of what we are trying to create when we convene a Minyan. The requirement to sanctify God's name is amongst the nation of Israel. That would imply that the only venue for expressions of sanctity (דברים שבקדושה) would be when the entire nation is gathered. That would make this a rare, if not impossible, mitzvah to accomplish. Chazal through a linguistic parallel bring us to a world (Shlach and Korach) where a small group, the ten evil spies, is indiscernible from the whole nation. They found a paradigm where a subset of the nation is seen as being essentially the same as the nation as a whole.¹⁶ A place where the Torah conflated the many with the few and the whole with a subset. Now we can finally understand the insight that Chazal are providing us when they derived a Minyan from the Meraglim and Korach. Every Minyan in essence is a representation of the nation as a whole (ונקדשתי בתוך בני ישראל=תוך=עדה=עדה=10) and therefore permits them to sanctify God's name as if they are the entire nation and that is the secret and the power of a Minyan.¹⁷ B'ezrat Hashem, we should once again have the opportunity to consistently pray in a Minyan and always appreciate and take to heart the tremendous strength and potential it provides us.

Shabbat Shalom

¹⁴ כל מי שיש בידו למחות ואינו מוחה – נענש עליו (שבת נד: וע"ז יח).

¹⁵ עיין רמב"ן במדבר טז, כא ו"ז,

¹⁶ גם בפרשת שלח יש אותו רעיון לגבי העדים שסקלו את המקושש עצים שהתורה מייצג אותם כאלו כל העדה עשה את זה (במדבר טו, לה-לו ובספרי במדבר פ"ט סק"א ק"ד ובתורה תמימה שם אות ק"ד)

¹⁷ עיין שיעורים לזכר אבי מרי ז"ל חלק ב' בענין פסוקי דזמרה (דף לד בהוצאת מוסד הרב קוק) ...כי כל בי עשרה מייצג את עם ישראל כולו...