

Parshat Korach 5768

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It is a given, a fact known to every Jew, that certain religious services require a quorum, a minyan of (at least) ten male adults. Included in these services are the Kriat Hatorah (public Torah readings), Chazarat HaShatz (repetition of Shmoneh Esrei), or the recitation of the Kaddish. These, as well as several other services, fall under the category of Davar Sheh'bikdusha, and every Davar Sheh'bikdusha requires a minyan.

What is the origin of this Halakha, and from where do our sages derive this well-established law? The Gemara Megilla (23b) poses this very question and the Gemara cannot find a specific verse in all of Tenach (Bible) that sheds light on our subject. However, the Gemara does find the answer by utilizing one of the Shlosh Esrei Midot (thirteen hermeneutical principles) by which the Torah is expounded, namely, the gezeirat shava. That is, by examining two or more verses that have the same or common word which appear to be superfluous and then let each verse complement and shed light upon one another.

We have a verse in Vayikra (22:32) regarding Kedusha, (holiness), VENIKDASHTI, “And I shall be sanctified “among” (BETOCH) the Children of Israel”. Then we find in our parsha, parshat Korach,(16:21), referring to the rebellious congregation of Korach, HaShem says to Moshe and Aharon “Separate yourselves from “among” (MITOCH) Ha’edah, the congregation. We find a commonality with the word BETOCH and MITOCH, from each of the two verses. Finally, going back to last weeks parsha, by the story of the twelve Meraglim (scouts) that Moshe sends to investigate the Land of Israel, and ten of them return with a negative report, there HaShem expresses His anger by stating (Bamidbar 14:27), “How long shall this evil “congregation” (EDAH) exist?” Just as in the case of the scouts, the congregation (EDAH) referred to be a group of ten men, so too then in the case of Korach, the expression of ‘among the congregation, Edah’ refers to a group of at least ten men. So by combining the term Kedusha with the case of Korach and the Meraglim we derive the formula that a Davar Sheh'bikdusha requires a minyan of ten.

Asked Rav Soloveitchik, if HaShem planted common words in two different scenarios of the Torah so that Chazal (Sages) should derive this basic principle of Judaism, that a minyan must contain at least ten men, could He not have chosen more positive cases rather than the wicked and rebellious group of Korach and the ten Meraglim? So the Rav suggested that we see the powerful impact a group of ten men can have upon the masses. A group of ten men were able to turn the hearts and minds of the entire nation against Moshe and against going to Eretz Yisrael. Then, by the same token, we can learn from here how great the influence of ten Tzaddikim, ten righteous men could have

upon multitudes of people. A small group of ten religious men can upgrade the religiosity of an entire neighborhood. That is why when Avraham Avinu pleaded on behalf of the people of S'dom, he said to HaShem, "If there are ten Tzaddikim in the city (of S'dom) would You destroy the entire city?" To which HaShem replies, "If there will be found ten tzaddikim in the city, I will spare the entire city from destruction". Why? Because HaShem knew the power of ten.

One religious neighborhood could elevate an entire community and even a city. By being positive and determined we can change the world to a standard of sanctification and holiness