

PARASHAS EMOR

The Power of Connection

They were ten of the best and finest Jewish men, the pride of the Jewish people who had emerged in the Egyptian exodus. And yet these ten men brought untold calamity upon their people. Sent by Moses to reconnoiter the Promised Land before the people actually crossed into it, these ten spies brought back the most slanderous and distorted reports to the desert encampments. They caused such dissension and turmoil that the entry into the Promised Land was postponed for nearly forty years, after the entire generation had passed away and a new generation emerged.

Is there anything constructive to be learned from these ten wicked sinners? Strangely enough, it seems that there is.

In this week's Torah portion, we read that Hashem "will be sanctified amidst the Jewish people." The Talmud points out that "amidst" refers to a *minyan*, a quorum of ten men, the minimum number of Jews whose presence is required for prayers and readings of special sanctity. How do we know this? By an exegetic comparison, the Talmud explains, to the word "amidst" that appears in the narrative of the spies. Just as that "amidst" refers to a group of ten, so too does the "amidst" of sanctified prayers and readings refer to a group of ten.

But the question immediately jumps out at us. Why did the Torah see fit to derive the guidelines for the *minyan* from the number of slanderous spies? Could this information not have been conveyed in some other fashion?

The commentators explain that the Torah is teaching us a very important lesson here. There are many forces in the physical world which we instinctively view as destructive, such as dynamite and the splitting of the atom. But in actuality, these very destructive forces can be put to beneficial use. Dynamite can be used not only to wreak destruction but also to clear a path through mountains and forests for new highways to serve civilization. The splitting of the atom does not necessarily have to result in mushroom clouds over populous cities. It can also be harnessed to provide power for industry and private homes. Everything depends on how it is used.

The forces in the spiritual world also follow the same pattern. If a group of ten men could produce results of such destructive intensity that calamity would befall millions of Jews, this was clearly an extremely potent spiritual force. Clearly, the connection effected by the critical

mass of ten Jews was so powerful that the group became far greater than the sum of its parts. Surely, this selfsame force could also be harnessed for the good to create the proper spiritual environment for prayers and readings of special sanctity.

A general deployed his army on the battlefield, preparing for the onslaught of a vastly superior enemy force. He exhorted his troops to rise above their limitations in numbers and weaponry, to fight heroically and defeat the enemy against all odds.

The battle began, and the army held fast, fighting desperately for every inch of territory, But as the battle wore on, the superiority of the enemy began to take its toll. First the right flank caved in, then the left flank. The center held out for a while longer, then it too collapsed. Only one battalion entrenched on a hilltop held out. They fought furiously and with utmost bravery until they broke through the enemy lines. They attacked the enemy's communications and command posts, wreaking such havoc that the battle ground to an inconclusive halt.

The soldiers in the heroic battalion all received medals and commendations, eventually becoming the subjects of military legend.

"How could your few men have accomplished such an amazing feat?" the captain was asked at the ceremony.

"It's quite simple," said the captain. "Before the battle, we all made a pact that we were willing to die for each other and the fatherland. We all connected and became one solid group, not just a collection of individuals. There is no limit to what a group of men can do."

In our own lives, we often tend to withdraw into our own insular little worlds, enjoying the comforts and pleasures of our homes and hearths with only a tangential relationship to the community at large. By doing so, however, we forgo the opportunity to be part of a greater good. But if we connect with others in the community, if we forge alliances for the accomplishment of important goals for the community, we can tap into the enormous spiritual power of the group and reap the benefits in every aspect of our lives.