

You will be left few in number. (28: 62)

What a terrible curse. Our numbers will diminish as a result of the troubles of the exile to which we will be subjected. What makes it worse is the loneliness that results from depleted numbers. When one is the member of a large group, he will always find a partner, someone to whom he can gravitate and develop a friendship. When the numbers are greatly diminished, however, allowing for one person in one place and another distant from him, the feeling of loneliness begins to set in. The curse of *b'm'sei me'at*, being left few in number, has a dual connotation. First of all, our numbers will be greatly diminished. The once proud nation, whose numbers rivaled those of its enemies, was now cut down to one here and one there, an insignificant number. Second, we will no longer be together. Once the numbers are cut down, all that will remain will be small pockets of individuals with little in common with one another.

Following the greatest tragedy of the twentieth century -- and perhaps in the history of our long exile -- the European Holocaust, only a small number of survivors remained, one or two from a village, a few more from a city, a completely disjointed group of people shell-shocked and having to go at it alone. In one of his travels throughout the United States, the *Klausenberger Rebbe*, *zl*, hero of the Holocaust, a scholar of epic proportion -- who had very few peers in his vast erudition which was overshadowed only by his outstanding love of the Jewish People and our G-d -- Hashem -- was once sitting on a train traveling to a city in the Midwest. He sat in his seat all by himself, reciting from *Sefer Tehillim*. At one of the stops, a middle-aged Jew entered his car. As the man walked through the car, he noticed the *Rebbe* fervently engrossed in his *Tehillim* recital. This man was extremely bothered by this sight, since he had sadly rejected the religion of his ancestors following the many tragedies that he had personally experienced. There is nothing that fosters bitter animus more than seeing someone doing what, deep in your heart, you know you should also be doing.

Seeing the *Rebbe* engrossed in his *Tehillim*, the Jew had the nerve to go over to the *Rebbe* and ask, "You (people) are still saying *Tehillim* after what we went through. You should know, it does not make a difference. I was on the lowest level of the *yeshivah* students of our town, yet I lived; I survived. All my friends -- who were so much more learned and G-d-fearing than I was -- died. Indeed, from all those who were G-d-fearing, I, who was the least, am the only survivor. How do you explain this?"

The *Rebbe* listened intensely to the man's denouncement, and he began to cry bitterly. The *Rebbe* looked at him and said, "I, too, was the weakest, and least spiritually inclined of my town. I have no idea why I was saved when so many others, who were clearly more spiritually adept than I was, died in Hitler's Holocaust. This is why I cry!"

When the Jew saw the *Rebbe's* reaction to his comment, he was struck with awe of the *Rebbe*. He sat down next to the *Rebbe* and also began to cry. He practically fell on the *Rebbe*. Two men crying -- each one had sustained a terrible loss: one left Judaism; one stayed. Now they were both together, connected by a common bond. They were both the remnants, the survivors. They

represented the future.