

Moshe assembled the entire congregation of Bnei Yisrael. (35:1)

The *Avnei Nezer* explains that as the *Mishkan*'s construction came to a conclusion, Moshe *Rabbeinu* assembled the entire nation for the purpose of teaching them the importance of harmony. The goal of the *Mishkan* is to serve as the one unifying place, the singular force towards which all of the Jewish People focus their prayers and sacrifices. Until the completion of the *Mishkan*, it was permissible to offer sacrifices on *Bamos*, personal altars. Each and every Jew did his own thing, expressing his service to Hashem on his personal wavelength, exclusive of his neighbor. *Tefillah* was an individual endeavor. It was not *b'tzibbur*, expressed through the entirety of a cohesive communal effort. It was splintered and exclusionary, while the *Mishkan* was to be cohesive and inclusive.

The power of a unified *Klal Yisrael* is awesome. In his commentary to *Parashas Korach*, *Be'er Moshe*, the *Ozrover Rebbe, zl*, observes what seems to be an anomaly concerning the *Yehi ratzon* prayer recited by the *chazzan*, leader of the prayer service, following *Krias HaTorah* on Monday and Thursday. This series of prayers which all begin with *Yehi ratzon*, "May it be the will," contains supplications for the health and continued welfare of the *shearis Yisrael*, remnant of the Jewish People in exile, for its spiritual leadership and their families. These prayers are followed by a communal supplication which begins, *Acheinu kol bais Yisrael*, "Our brothers, the entire family of *Yisrael*," which beseeches the Almighty to deliver from distress and captivity, from pain and misery, any Jew who is in need, regardless of his geographical location. The *Rebbe* wonders why the last prayer does not begin with *Yehi ratzon*, as its predecessors do. He explains that the *tefillah* commences with the invocation, *Acheinu kol bais Yisrael*, whereby all Jews are united under one family banner. When there is unity among Jews, there is no need to **ask** *Yehi ratzon*. The *eis ratzon*, period of good-will, is aroused by a unified people. There is no greater inspiration for good will than when Jews act toward one another as *acheinu*, our brother.

Horav Moshe Soloveitchik, zl, suggests that the concept of *tefillah b'tzibbur*, communal prayer with a *minyan*, quorum of at least ten men, has had a critical impact on the survival of *Klal Yisrael*. Ordinarily, one would wonder why *tefillah b'tzibbur* is so important; why *Chazal* were very stringent in underscoring the absolute need for prayers to be recited in a communal gathering place, such as a *shul*. He explains that if Jews had not been compelled to pray in *shul*, the average Jew would not have survived the vicissitudes of life's challenges. The only ones who would have gone to the *shul* would have been the *talmidei chachamim*, Torah scholars, the spiritual elite, who would all study in the *shul*. The simple Jew whose life does not revolve around Torah study would have no reason to attend, thus depriving himself of a spiritual relationship with like-minded Jews. A Jew alone in exile in countries where spiritual ascendancy is not encouraged needs a brother, and friend, to offer him *chizuk*, to encourage and embolden him to maintain his spiritual affiliation. This takes place during the daily prayer services when **all** Jews congregate together to pray as one.

The following story underscores and defines the benefit and true essence of unity. When Napoleon Bonaparte, self-proclaimed emperor of Europe, reached the outskirts of Russia, it was the summer of 1812. He stood at the helm of an army consisting of half a million soldiers. Already having conquered most of Europe, his heart was now set on the Russian bear. Although he really desired to conquer this vast country, he was smart enough to acknowledge that this would not be a simple task. Thus, the emperor decided that he would pay a visit to *Horav Chaim Volozhiner, zl*, and seek his sage advice.

“What counsel do you suggest concerning my forthcoming battle with the Russians? Will this war end in victory for me, or does a catastrophic end await my army?” Napoleon asked *Rav Chaim*.

Rav Chaim replied with an analogy: A prince once traveled through the countryside in a carriage that was fashioned from the finest woods. His horses were among the finest steeds in the country, each imported from a foreign land, each with its own unique pedigree. They traveled quickly through the day until nightfall, at which point the horses could not see that well. The driver, fearing for his well-being if the prince would be delayed, pushed the horses even harder. The road changed and became very muddy, causing the horses to slip. Once the first horse fell, the second followed, until all four horses had slipped, causing the carriage to turn over tossing its distinguished passengers into the mud.

The horses could not pull the carriage out of the mud. A few hours went by and a simple farmer appeared, driving a wagon which was pulled by three horses that appeared to have been left over from “Pharaoh’s” time! This was the region’s idea of AAA road service. The prince was quite incredulous when the farmer offered to help. After all, what could the farmer’s three “has been” horses do, that his own precious horses could not do? Well, it took the farmer five minutes to pull the carriage from the mud. Shocked, the prince asked, “How could your horses achieve what my horses failed to do?”

The farmer explained, “Sir, it is simple. Your horses are aristocratic, each one among the finest and most exalted steeds in its respective country. When you give a signal or touch them with your whip – each individual horse does what is best for **it**. It pulls the way it wants to go. It is not part of a collective team, because each horse is from a different land.

“My three horses are family, all born to the same mare. They were raised together on the same farm. While **individually** – horse for horse – they are no match for any of your horses, as a team – they excel! They are all one family.”

“The lesson,” explained *Rav Chaim*, “is quite simple. As the Emperor Napoleon, you have gathered a fine army of soldiers from throughout the world! They may be individually great, but they are lacking as a team. On the other hand, the Russian army is comprised of soldiers who are all from within the government’s region. They are family, with each soldier feeling a sense of empathy for his brother soldier. This is an unbeatable combination. It is for this reason that I question your

ability to triumph over them.”

History has proven the brilliance of *Rav* Chaim’s advice. Nothing can overcome the power of *achdus*, a unified group whose members work together cohesively as one.

An elderly Jew, a survivor from the European Holocaust, related the following incident which took place in the concentration camp where he was interned: The Germans employed their Jewish compatriots as guards to police themselves. In other words, if something was not perfect, the Jewish guards were taken to task. It was a “no win” situation, whereby the Jewish police were stuck between a “rock and a hard place.” One day, something was taken from the commandant’s office. The Gestapo came in *en masse*, armed to the teeth, demanding the identity of the culprit. “Who is responsible for this dastardly act?” they asked.

“We are all responsible,” the prisoners answered in unison. “It is all our fault. We are all prepared to pay for our sin!”

The Gestapo were shocked by this display of unity among the prisoners. This was something to which they were not accustomed. They let them all go back to the block, with no punishment.