

Gather yourselves together, that I may tell you that which shall befall you in the end of days. Assemble yourselves and hear, you sons of Yaakov and listen unto Yisrael your father (49:1,2)

The commentators raise a number of questions regarding the text of Yaakov's command to his sons to prepare themselves for the final blessings which they were to receive from him: First, why must this message be conveyed in the presence of **all** the brothers assembled together? Second, what is the significance of the word, "hear/listen"? What else are they supposed to do, if not listen to Yaakov? Third, why does the *pasuk* begin by referring to the Patriarch as Yaakov and end by calling him *Yisrael*?

Horav Eliyahu Schlesinger Shlita, cites *Horav Baruch Epstein z.l.*, who, in his *sefer Baruch She'omar*, explains the disparity in the *pasuk* which we recite daily, "*How goodly are your tents, Yaakov, your dwellings places, Yisrael.*" He raises two issues: First, why does the *pasuk* commence with reference to Yaakov and end with reference to *Yisrael*? Second, why in regard to Yaakov does the *pasuk* employ "*your tents,*" while concerning *Yisrael* the word used is "*your dwelling places*"? He explains that the name *Yisrael* is more dignified, since it describes the Patriarch in his moment of strength during victory over Eisav's angel. It indicates power, sovereignty and respect. Indeed, the name *Yisrael* was given to Yaakov by Hashem. Conversely, the name Yaakov alludes to the Patriarch in a weakened state, holding on to the heel of Eisav. It implies a position that is exposed, fragile, and vulnerable. The commentators suggest that the name "Yaakov" is usually applied to our people during their period of exile. This is a time in which they have no permanent home. They are driven from place to place at the whim of their oppressors. Their spirits are low, their self-esteem practically non-existent. When *Klal Yisrael* is in *galus*, exile, the *Torah* is in a similar exiled condition. Every aspect of their *Torah* study is impermanent, temporary in nature. There is, unfortunately, no true stability to *Torah* study while we suffer in *galus*. Consequently, the name *Yisrael* is used when *Klal Yisrael* is residing peacefully on their own land. The name *Yisrael* is equated with security and confidence, while the name Yaakov reflects instability.

There is also a distinct difference between an *ohel*, tent, and a *mishkan*, dwelling place. A tent is fragile and flimsy, comprised of various components which enable its transport to various places. The *ohel* is made to be moved from place to place. It lacks stability and soundness. In contrast, the word *mishkan* implies an edifice which has a solid foundation. It connotes durability and permanence. Similarly, the name Yaakov is equated with *ohel*, while the name *Yisrael* is used in connection with *mishkan*.

As Yaakov *Avinu* prepared to speak to his sons regarding *Acharis Ha'yamim*, the end of days, he was well aware of two primary issues to be addressed during the period of time before the advent

of *Moshiach*. The first issue is the tragic divisiveness which will exist amongst *Klal Yisrael*. The conflict between brothers will become intense, such that anyone who is unwilling to adhere to the mandate of *Torah* will forge for themselves new and alien ideologies. The second issue is the unwillingness to "listen" to someone else. This resistance to hear what someone else has to say, to take heed of the reproof of those far greater than he, bespeaks a recalcitrance that denies one the opportunity for spiritual ascendancy and moral perfection.

Two things--working together in harmony and the ability to listen, to take heed of the message of truth -- will be the two most critical issues of *Acharis Ha'yamim*. This, opines *Horav* Schlesinger, was the underlying commitment of *Klal Yisrael* when they accepted the *Torah*. "*Na'aseh--we will do; V'nishnma--and we will listen*," they proclaimed. We will work together, and we will listen to Hashem's message.

Thus, Yaakov charged his sons: Gather around; assemble together and listen, sons of Yaakov, listen to the message of *Yisrael*, your father, as to what will occur to you in the end of days. Perhaps you wonder, "Can we get together during our periods of persecution, when we are suffering in exile?" Worry not, sons of Yaakov, a name which implies exile and suffering. Unity is not a requisite simply when times are good, when you are resting comfortably in your own land, secure and free from persecution. *Achdus* is an integral quality in the fiber of *Klal Yisrael*. You must assemble together to survive. With these two characteristics--unity amongst yourselves, and maintaining the ability to listen to others and accept what you hear -- you will survive throughout history until that glorious day that will usher in *Moshiach Tzidkeinu*.