

How can I carry alone your troublesomeness, your burdensomeness, and your contentiousness? (1:12)

Parashas Devarim, which is also known as *Shabbos Chazon*, is read on the *Shabbos* prior to *Tishah B'Av*. One of the reasons for this tradition is the above *pasuk*, which begins with the word, *eichah*, "How?" This coincides with the *Eichah yashvah vadad*, "How did she (*Klal Yisrael*/Yerushalayim) sit alone?" the opening *pasuk* of *Megillas Eichah*, the Book of Lamentations, which is read on *Tisha B'Av*. The *Midrash* teaches, "Three prophesied with the word *Eichah*: Moshe *Rabbeinu*; Yishayahu; and Yirmiyahu. Moshe said, *Eichah esa levadi*, "How can I carry alone?" Yishayahu said, *Eichah haysah l'zonah*, "How did she become like a harlot?" Yirmiyahu lamented, *Eichah yashvah vadad*, "How did she sit alone?" *Chazal* are teaching us an important lesson which certainly goes beyond the association of these three words. Obviously, the *eichah* which Yishayahu expressed denotes the sinful behavior which catalyzed the *eichah* of punishment, the loneliness brought on by Hashem that Yirmiyahu mourns. How is Moshe's expression of exasperation concerning the people's disregard for authority, their contentions and troublesome nature, connected to the sins that provoked Hashem's wrath and the eventual destruction of the *Bais HaMikdash*?

Furthermore, this *Parshah*, which signals the beginning of Moshe's rebuke concerning the nation's behavior these past forty years, focuses first on the sin of the *meraglim*, spies. Indeed, the first *perek*, chapter, of this *parshah* occupies itself primarily with this sin. There is the request for spies, followed by the spies' slanderous report and the people's unwarranted and ultimately tragic response. Why does Moshe preempt this with his lament concerning being alone, followed by his appointing judges – something to which they had agreed? Appointing judges does not on the surface imply any wrongdoing on the part of the nation. Why is it included in the rebuke, which begins, "*Eichah*?"

Horav Bentzion Firer, zl, suggests that the answer lies in Moshe's order, "Provide yourselves men, wise and understanding and renowned to your tribes, and I will designate them your leaders" (*ibid.* 1:13). The people agreed and were happy to select individual leaders. What is wrong with this? *L'shivteichem*, "For your (individual) tribes." Moshe was acutely aware that no tribe would rely on a leader selected from another tribe. Tribal rivalry still reigned among them. The lack of trust that existed between brothers was a matter of concern. The competition between tribes came to the fore once again when there was an issue regarding sending spies to reconnoiter *Eretz Yisrael*. Each *shevet* wanted its own tribal representative. They were not comfortable with a representative from another *shevet*.

Twelve tribes – twelve spies, each one focused on how best to represent his individual tribe. Fifty states – fifty governors, each lobbying for his personal issue, his home state. It may work in secular government; rather, it may be the accepted norm, but it does not necessarily work. It certainly is not the Torah-oriented approach to leadership. We are all in this together; each tribe focused on

Hashem. Our best interests are on how best to serve the Almighty, not what is best for my individual tribe. Now let us imagine what took place when the spies, each representing his individual *shevet*, met to discuss what they observed and how best to present their report to Moshe and the people. One spy said, "We cannot win this war. The pagan nations are stronger, more powerful than we are. There is no way that we can enter the Land, battle with its citizens, and emerge victorious. The other eleven spies heard this and were immediately concerned. If they disputed this single spy, their individual constituents might claim that they had neglected the needs of the people; they did not care about the nation's security. Had there been only two spies, it is quite possible that there never would have been a slander issue. When there are twelve – well, we know what happened.

Chazal teach that the punishment of *Churban Bais HaMikdash* resulted from the nation's reaction to the spies' slanderous report concerning their trip to *Eretz Yisrael*: "You cried for an unwarranted reason (*bechiyah shel chinam*); I will establish for you a weeping for generations." Our national day of mourning, *Tishah B'Av*, the day set aside for weeping over our national and personal losses, came about as the result of the sin of the *meraglim*. The sin that resulted from rivalry and distrust among the tribes eventually produced *Tishah B'Av*.

"How can I carry alone?" Provide yourselves men, wise and understanding, and renowned to your tribes." *L'shivteichem* resulted from *eichah esah levado*. Together, they were the precursor of *Eichah yashvah vadad*.