

SHELACH (NUMBERS 13:1-15:41)

Ten Times One Equals Infinity

2003 · Rabbi Yerachmiel Seplovitz

One of the less pleasant aspects of my job as a chaplain for the elderly is the need to officiate at funerals. When meeting with the families, I address the issue of Kaddish. If they are unable (or unwilling) to attend synagogue services daily for eleven months, it is appropriate to arrange for someone else to recite the Kaddish.

Often the family will authorize me to say Kaddish and make a donation to charity in memory of the departed. However, another response I get is, it's okay, Rabbi, we'll just say Kaddish at home.

Makes sense, doesn't it? Why ask some strange rabbi to say Kaddish for my father when I can do it myself?! This rabbi didn't know and love my father the way I did. Why should I let a stranger do what I should be doing? So what if I can't (read: won't) go to Shul every morning? Shouldn't I be the one praying on behalf of my father?!

Good point. What needs to be understood is that Kaddish is not a prayer for the dead. If it were, then it would certainly be logical that the child should be the one to say it, even at home, without a *Minyan*. (Which is fully appropriate in the case of *Yizkor*.) However, the point of Kaddish is to fulfill the Mitzvah of ". . . *I must be sanctified among the Israelites.*" (*Leviticus*, 22:32)

One of the 613 Mitzvahs is the obligation to PUBLICLY declare the sanctity of G-d's name. This is done several times during the synagogue service. Kaddish is recited, in various forms, at different parts of the service. It is most often recited by the person who is leading the service, whether or not he is a mourner. The Mourner's Kaddish has been included in the service to afford the mourner an opportunity to fulfill this Mitzvah as a tribute to his departed relative.

There are many Mitzvahs that can and should be done as a tribute to the departed. Kaddish is just one of many. Charity, Torah study, and just plain commitment to a Torah lifestyle are all things that we do on behalf of our loved ones who are no longer here and able to perform these Mitzvahs.

One can give charity in private, and one can study Torah in private. One thing that cannot be done in private is to fulfill the Mitzvah of PUBLICLY sanctifying G-d's name. Saying Kaddish in private defeats the whole purpose of that particular Mitzvah. While it is certainly preferred, under the right circumstances, for the mourner himself to be the one to recite Kaddish in the synagogue, appointing a proxy to make that public declaration accomplishes the next best thing.

Okay, now that we have established that Kaddish needs to be said in public, the question is how do we define “in public?” The source for the requirement of a *Minyan*, a quorum of ten, is a surprising one.

In this week’s Torah Portion, we learn about twelve spies who were sent to scout the Land of Israel. Two of them, Joshua and Caleb, returned with words of inspiration and encouragement. The other ten reported that it would be impossible for the Israelites to conquer the inhabitants of the Land. As a result, the Nation rejected the Land, and clamored to return to Egypt.

Their punishment was that per their request, they would **not** be permitted to enter the Land of Israel. They were to wander in the desert for forty years, until all adults would perish. Only those who had left Egypt under the age of twenty (with the exception of Joshua and Caleb) would live to see the land. The adults didn’t want the Land of Israel; they were not going to get the Land of Israel. (“Be careful what you hope for; you may just get it!”)

And what about the spies themselves? *G-d spoke to Moses and Aaron, saying, “How long shall this evil Congregation exist, complaining against Me?”* (Numbers, 14:26-27)

The ten spies who slandered the Land of Israel, “*this evil Congregation*,” perished immediately. They had caused irreparable damage to the Nation of Israel, and were eliminated. (See “What Was Moses’ Last Name?” and “Fringe Benefits”)

They do, however leave a legacy. The Talmud (Sanhedrin, 74b) deduces from the fact that these ten men are referred to as “*this evil **Congregation*” that a congregation consists of a minimum of ten men.

WHAT?!! These ten scoundrels are the basis for a *Minyan*?! Does that make any sense? They caused untold suffering for our People. Their actions prevented hundreds of thousands of Jews from entering the Promised Land. The date of this event, the 9th day of the month of Av, became a day of national mourning that continues to this very day. How can we allow the coincidence of the fact that these ten bums are called a *Congregation*, and an *evil* one at that, dictate to us how many people have to be around to answer to Kaddish and other public prayers?

Certain Mitzvahs can and should be done in private. Certain Mitzvahs can and must be done in public. A *Kiddush Hashem*, a public sanctification of G-d’s name, is greater, depending upon the size of the group. Conversely, a *Chillul Hashem*, a public desecration of G-d’s name, is more devastating, depending upon the size of the group.

The Talmud (Avos, 3:7) tells us that the Divine Presence of G-d dwells among any group of ten people who do His will. The ten spies had G-d among them, but with their evil intentions, they chased Him away.

When we do the right thing, in spite of the peer pressures of those around us, we sanctify G-d's name. The "public" doesn't have to be a GOOD "public," it just has to be a "public." (It is an interesting irony that while a *Minyan* need not consist of RIGHTEOUS people, it may not consist of absolutely WICKED people. Hence, the ten spies, from whom we learn the concept of a *Minyan*, probably would not qualify to be included in one. -- food for thought.) Take nine of any righteous people you can think of. Let's say, for example, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, Aaron, David, Noah, and your Uncle Sidney. No *Minyan*. You can't say Kaddish or any of several other communal prayers.

Take, however, ten simple Jews, not especially learned or exemplary in any particular manner, and you've got a public quorum. You've got the ability to publicly declare the greatness of G-d. They may not be all that holy just yet, but when we gather together to declare G-d's holiness, we collectively become greater than the sum of our parts.

Have a great Shabbos.

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