

THE IMPORTANCE OF ACHDUT AND UNITY

In the Torah portion Veytseh we read “*he (Yaakov) took from the stones of the place (Mount Moriah Noach brought his korban, where Yitzchak was offered as sacrifice and where the Bait Hamikdash once stood) and arranged them around his head and lay down in that place*” (Bereishit 28:11).

The Midrash says that there were twelve stones and they all joined each other and formed one stone to be under Yaakov’s head. What is the significance of this? Kabbalistically the number twelve symbolizes the maximum of multiplicity. That’s why there are twelve months in a year, twelve tribes of Israel twelve lines which form the ideal three dimensional structure which is the cube etc. The number 13 symbolizes the coming together of the 12 individual parts to form a unity. That’s why the word echad=13 and the word ahava=13 (joining together of two individuals). This is also why the boy becomes bar mitzvah at 13 and the girl at 12 (the reason for the difference between the boy and girl is based on their nature of chochma and bina, which is beyond the scope of this devar torah). Now we can try to understand what the stones symbolized. Each one of the stones symbolized a tribe which was to come from Yaakov. Although each tribe is individually separate they join together to form the nation of Israel which is echad (one) =13.

Rav Hirsch asks why did Hashem have to make twelve tribes? And more specifically why did he have to give each tribe a special power (symbolized by the signs of each tribe and the blessings that Yaakov gave each one)? The answer is certainly a fundamental principle in Torah which is unfortunately not taught enough. The following will hopefully put this idea in perspective.

One way to look at the difference between a Jew and a non-Jew is by their internal definition of being good. A Jewish person is naturally inclined to judge him/herself based on the objective definition of good. This means that a Jew does not consider him/herself righteous by comparing him/herself to others. Rather a Jew sticks to the principles of goodness which are objective. This is why the Jews were given the Torah which is an objective guide to being good. Non-Jews on the other hand judge their own goodness based on subjective definitions of goodness. This means that a non-Jew naturally compares him/herself to other people and then decides that compared to them I am good, bad or in the middle.

A fundamental difference between the two thought processes is that in the subjective outlook on being good only a small percentage can be considered good and a small percentage can be considered bad. After all if you are like the majority then you are in the middle (subjectively speaking). However, objectively any percentage of people can be good, bad or in the middle. How does this pertain to our question? Rav Hirsch says that it is the job of the Jewish people to introduce the non-Jews to Torah. The way to do this is by setting an example by following the laws of the Torah. Then once the non-Jews compare themselves subjectively to the Jews who are keeping the Torah they will see that they are not considered good and thereby it will lead them to follow the ways of the Jewish people so that they can have a guilt-free conscience knowing that they are

subjectively good. This is the real job of the Jewish people and this is why twelve tribes were needed each with different powers.

In order for the non-Jews to be able to compare themselves to the Jews there will have to be some kind of similarity between them. After all a non-Jewish farmer will not compare him/herself to a Jewish Doctor. That's why Rav Hirsch says that each tribe had to have a different power and different talents so that all the other non-Jewish nations and peoples will be able to relate to each one in a certain way and thereby set in motion the subjective comparisons of the non-Jews. A great example of this is Yissachar and Zevulun. We know that Yissachar learned all day and Zevulun supported him. This way the non-Jewish scholar can compare himself to Yissachar and the non-Jewish business man can compare him/herself to Zevulun.

From here must derive great lesson in achdut (unity). There are unfortunately sects in Judaism which claim to have the only right answer while accusing others of living a lie. This is certainly not a Jewish idea. As long as a Jew is following the Torah he or she can be a Doctor, a farmer, a businessman, a Chasid who learns all day and even a lawyer. Each one is needed to show that the Torah can be followed no matter what profession you have, where you live and what your circumstances are. It is like a concert where each musical instrument joins with the other to produce the wonderful thing called music. Each instrument enhances the quality of the music and thereby makes the sound more beautiful to the ear.

However, it must be pointed out that anything that goes against the Torah (oral or written) is not music. Sects like Jews for Jesus, Reform and Conservative are not contributing to the music at all. In fact they are destroying it. These sects are analogous to the off-beat drummer in the back who ruins the music for everybody.

The bottom line is that as long as one is following the rules of the Torah then no one has the right to condemn them for their way of life. This means that a Chasid can not say to a Doctor that only the Chasid way of life is correct and vice versa. The same goes for Ashkenazim, Sefardim, Breslovers, Chabanics, Litvish, Doctors, lawyers, mechanics, farmers, plumbers etc. Just like each of the twelve tribes was needed each one of them is needed as well. In the beautiful words of Rav Hirsch:

The Jewish nation is to represent agriculture as well as commerce, militarism as well as culture and learning. The Jewish people will be a nation of farmers, a nation of businessmen, a nation of soldiers and a nation of science. Thereby, as a model nation, to establish the truth that the one great personal and national task which G-d revealed in his Torah is not dependent on any particular kind of talent or character trait, but that the whole of humanity in all its shades and diversity can equally find its calling in one common spiritual and moral mission and outlook on life. (Rav Hirsch Commentary on Bereishit 48:3-4)