

This week's Parsha begins in a rather unique fashion. The opening verse reads "And Moshe assembled all the congregation of the children of Israel, and said to them: "These are the words which the G-D has commanded, that you should do them." Although the verse indicates that there are words that Hashem commanded to be done, the actual commandment is not mentioned in the verse. Of course, the simple understanding would be to read further in the next verse and there we read about the commandment of Shabbat. Therefore, one could assume that the Moshe gathered together the Jewish people for the specific purpose of reviewing for them the laws of Shabbat.

However, the Gerrer Rebbe (Rabbi Yitzchak Meir Alter) suggests a different reading of the verse. He believes that the commandment that G-D commanded is not referring to the next verse which contains the commandment to keep Shabbat; rather it refers to the preceding words, Moshe's assembling of the Jews. According to the Rebbe, G-D did not command Moshe to gather the Jews together to hear the laws of Shabbat, rather G-D commanded Moshe to gather the Jews together to have the Jews reunite and come together once again. It is not relevant what is said or heard at the gathering, just the fact that Jews are gathering together once again is itself a most valuable and incredible experience.

Sometimes, especially during trying times, we become distant and separate from one another. We think mostly of ourselves and what is good for us individually. We forget to think about our fellow Jews and what is good for us as a nation, it is so powerful and so meaningful to gather together at those precise moments to remind ourselves that ultimately we are a nation and that should be foremost on our mind. The antidote to sin of the golden calf in last week's Parsha is the coming together of the Jews in this week's Parsha.

It is interesting to note that, although, the word "Vayakhel", "and he (Moshe) gathered together" is the first word of the Parsha, it did not have to be chosen as the name of the Parsha. There are many occasions when the first word does not actually become the title of the Parsha. Why then is the word Vayakhel chosen as the name, it certainly does not reflect the essence of this Parsha? Perhaps, it is for this very reason, to tell us the importance of gathering together. To remind us that immediately after sad and trying episodes, the most immediate and important reaction is Vayakhel, gathering the people together.

The Rebbe says that there was one group that did not value the importance of joining together with the rest of the people, the Nesiim, the princes. The Torah tells us that after the all Jewish people came and brought their donations to the Temple, only then did the Nesiim bring their offering. Rashi offers the following excuse for their lackadaisical behavior; that their intentions were to wait and see what was missing from the initial offerings of the populace. Their plan was to make up the deficit with their own goods after all the calculations of the gifts were complete. However, the word Nesiim is written in the Torah with a missing letter "Yud", to let us know that regardless of intent, their behavior was still lacking. There was still something inappropriate about the way they acted. The Nesiim, the leaders of the Jewish people, more than anyone else should have realized the importance of joining together with the community. On the days that the Jewish people were flocking to the Mishkan to bring their offerings, how could they not have joined in? How could they have refrained from joining in such a huge outpouring of Jewish charity? It is for this reason that the letter "yud" is missing. The letter "yud", although it is the smallest letter, is also the most integral letter in many of G-D's names; just as we as a nation are small in number, yet with an infinite capacity for holiness. The Nessim, who failed to join the rest of this small, yet holy nation on the days of the donations, failed to appreciate the value of joining together and be part of the people. They did not deserve to have the letter "yud" in their title.

May we, the Jewish people, although small in number, always be united in holiness and continue to stand together in even the most trying and difficult of times.

Shabbat Shalom,

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