

## PIRKEI AVOS CHAPTER 3 MISHNAH 7

רבי חלפתא בן דוסא איש כפר חנניה אומר, עשרה שיושבין ועוסקין בתורה, שכניה שרויה ביניהם, שנאמר (תהלים פב) אלקים נצב בעדת קל. ומנין אפלו חמשה, שנאמר (עמוס ט) ואגדתו על ארץ יסדה. ומנין אפלו שלשה, שנאמר (תהלים פב) בקרב אלקים ישפט. ומנין אפלו שנים, שנאמר (מלאכי ג) אז נדברו יראי ה' איש אל רעהו ויקשב ה' וישמע וגו'. ומנין אפלו אחד, שנאמר (שמות כ) בכל המקום אשר אזכיר את שמי אבא אליך וברכתיד:

**Rabbi Chalafta of Kefar Hanania said: when ten sit together and occupy themselves with Torah, the Shechinah abides among them, as it is said: "God stands in the congregation of God" (Psalm 82:1). How do we know that the same is true even of five? As it is said: "This band of His He has established on earth" (Amos 9:6). How do we know that the same is true even of three? As it is said: "In the midst of the judges He judges" (Psalm 82:1) How do we know that the same is true even of two? As it is said: "Then they that fear the Lord spoke one with another, and the Lord hearkened, and heard" (Malachi 3:16). How do we know that the same is true even of one? As it is said: "In every place where I cause my name to be mentioned I will come unto you and bless you" (Exodus 20:21).**

R' Chalafta ben Dosa teaches that when people gather together for the purpose of studying Torah, the Divine Presence dwells in their midst. Over the course of the *mishnah* he begins by teaching that the Divine Presence is there when ten people gather together and then proceeds to teach that the Divine Presence will be there even if the group has five people present, or three, or two or even when a person studies Torah by himself, the Divine Presence is there. The obvious question is why was it necessary for R Chalafta to begin with ten people and work his way down? If the Divine Presence is there when a person studies by himself, then isn't obvious that he will remain if two people gather, or three or five or ten? Why would we think that he would be present when a person studies Torah alone but may not be present when two people study together?

One answer is that the concentration of Divine Presence varies depending on the size of the crowd. Ten people is a public gathering, and we would expect that a large concentration of the Divine Presence will be there. On the other hand, a group of five people is obviously smaller and the concentration of Divine Presence will decrease. R' Chalafta emphasizes that point even down to where a single individual is studying Torah and although the Divine Presence is there, it is in a relatively small concentration since he is by himself.

If you pay attention to the sequence of the *pesukim* that R' Chalafta cites you will see that this explanation makes sense. When ten people sit and study Torah, Hashem is

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standing there with them נצב. In contrast, when he discusses two people who gather to study or one person who sits and studies, it does not say that Hashem is standing with them. When it is two people the *mishnah* cites a *pasuk* that teaches that Hashem listens to what they say - ויקשב. And if it is an individual who studies Torah, the *pasuk* quoted simply says that Hashem will come and bless the individual. It does not state that he listens.

The *mishnah* is thus capturing a well-known principle called ברב עם הדרת מלך - in the multitude of the nation is the glory of the King. Every *mitzvah* that we do and Torah that we study invokes Hashem's Presence but the larger the crowd, the more honor we collectively give to Hashem. This is not only true when it comes to Torah study, as taught by R' Chalafta but it is also true regarding *davening*. Although it is true, as we experienced for the past ten months, that one could *daven* alone and it is effective but it does not compare to *davening* with a *minyan*. There is a fear amongst *rabbonim* that when COVID-19 wanes and life returns to normal that people will not be as motivated to come to shul. "If it worked the past year, it should continue to be just as good." Although Hashem is present when we *daven* at home, it is not the same as when we *daven* with a *minyan* and a larger crowd. We honor Hashem with our *davening* to a much greater degree when we *daven* as part of a group. I hope that everyone will bear this in mind as we inch closer, IY"H, to normalcy and the resumption of life as it was pre-COVID.

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