



GUEST CONTRIBUTOR DR. ERIC LITTMAN

This week
at the kollel →

Assembling a Congregation

The Children of Israel, the entire assembly, arrived in the Wilderness of Zin... Miriam died there...

There was no water for the assembly, so they gathered against Moshe and Aharon... The nation quarreled with Moshe...

These are *Mei M'riva*, "The Waters of Dispute..." (20:1–13)

THE EVENTS SURROUNDING THE *MEI M'RIVA* are very perplexing. Our Sages have offered numerous insights into these events, but, with Hashem's help, I would like to offer my own insight, based on some nuances within the text.

The Torah devotes thirteen verses to describe the events of *Mei M'riva*, and it uses three different Hebrew expressions to refer, respectively, to the congregation, assembly, and nation: *kahal*, *eidah*, and *am*.

Although those words are all synonyms when translated into English, each alludes to different aspects and "levels" of gatherings of people. *Am*, the lowest of the three, refers to a group bonded together by a national idea or ideal. *Eidah* refers to a group convened for a specific purpose—like *eidim*, witnesses, who are designated (*m'yu'adim* in Hebrew) for a purpose. (See Rabbi S. R. Hirsch, commentary to the twelfth chapter of Sh'mos.) *Kahal*, the highest form, refers to a group convened in a religious or refined manner.

With this knowledge, let's examine what the Torah is alluding to in these verses.

The two expressions in the first three verses of Chapter 20, *eidah* and *am*, demonstrate that the people were on a "low"

level and were only gathered as a nation traveling together, but also for a specific purpose—to complain against Moshe.

The use of the verb *vayikahalu* (related to the word *kahal*) in the second verse is mystifying, and it doesn't seem to fit with our previous explanation. However, one of the disciples of the Arizal, the Ba'al Bris Avraham, provides an interesting insight. He interprets the statement "They gathered (*vayikahalu*) against Moshe and Aharon," as referring to the fact that the nation came to console the two brothers on the loss of their sister, Miriam.

Picture this: The two greatest leaders of Israel are sitting *shiv'a*, and people come to console them over the loss of their sister. What do they say? "We have no water to drink!" What chutzpah! In addition to the tremendous disrespect to the grieving Moshe and Aharon, it demonstrates their complete lack of respect and appreciation for Miriam. However, even though the people, *ha'am*, quarreled with Moshe, the Torah, by saying *vayikahalu*, attests to their original, refined purpose in gathering together to comfort the mourners, and it accords them the appropriate honor.

The fourth verse illustrates the people's primary mistake. They challenged Moshe and Aharon, asking, "Why have you brought the congregation..." They did not ask, "Why has Hashem brought..." They thought that everything was at the behest of Moshe and Aharon. They still didn't get it—everything was, is, and always will be because of Hashem's Will. They were attributing all these events to mortal hands, instead of recognizing their true Source. Thus, even though they inappropriately as-

sumed the label *kahal*—because they truly believed that they were gathered in a lofty and refined manner—they were really only an *eidah*.

This is evidenced in verse 8, where Hashem tells Moshe to gather the assembly: "*V'hakhel es ha'eidah*." Hashem told Moshe that his job was to elevate the people from an *eidah* to the level of a *kahal*. When Moshe and Aharon gathered, *vayak'hilu*, the *kahal* together (verse 10) the Torah alludes to the fact that, had Moshe spoken to the rock as Hashem commanded, a major *Kiddush Hashem* (sanctification of G-d's Name) would have occurred, and that gathering would indeed have been on the level of a *kahal*. Instead, Moshe hit the rock, and although the *eidah* (verse 11) had water to drink, they were not elevated to the level of a *kahal* and no *Kiddush Hashem* occurred.

Hashem admonished and punished Moshe and Aharon (verse 12) for this shortcoming, and, as a result, they were not allowed to lead the *kahal* into the Land of Israel. In addition to punishing them for their missed potential of elevating the people to a *kahal*, Hashem alluded to the fact (and, arguably, also reassured them) that, in the future, the Children of Israel would be on the level of a *kahal*.

The numerical values of the Hebrew words *echad* and *ahava*, "one" and "love," are each thirteen. When we lack unity, love, and respect for each other, we have strife and dispute, *merivah*. However, when we are united, and we love and respect each other, a great *Kiddush Hashem* occurs.

These thirteen verses illustrate the former and allude to the latter. Are we

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At the Kollel

KEY: 🖐️ Beginners 🖐️🖐️ Intermediate 🖐️🖐️🖐️ Advanced 🚺🚻 for men and women

Looking for a chavrusa? See Coordinator Rabbi Chaim Heinemann!
Chavrusos are available noon–1 PM on weekdays, and 8–9:45 PM Sun.–Thurs.

Sunday *Free brunch!*

🖐️🖐️ **America Runs on Torah**
(Jewish Law & Parasha)
Rabbis Dani Schon
and Yisroel Kaufman.....10 AM
Grand Deluxe breakfast served

Tuesday

🚺🚻🖐️ **Partners in Torah
at the Mayerson JCC**
Rabbi Binyamin Teitelbaum.....8 PM

Wednesday

🚺🚻🖐️ **Torah Treasures for
Seniors at the Mayerson JCC**
Rabbi Yitzchok Preis..... 10:30–11:15 AM

🚺🚻🖐️ **Downtown Lunch-n-Learn
at Strauss & Troy**
Rabbi Yitzchok Preis..... 12–1 PM

Thursday

🖐️🖐️ **Halacha** (based on the parasha)
Rabbi Chaim Heinemann.....9:10–10 PM
Homemade refreshments served.

Minyanim Daylight Time

Shacharis
Sunday8:15 AM
Monday–Friday7:20 AM
ShabbosN/A

Mincha
Sunday7:45 PM
Monday–Thursday5:45 PM
Shabbos6:30 PM

Ma'ariv
In the Beis Midrash:
Sunday–Wednesday9:45 PM
Thursday10 PM
ShabbosN/A

Every Day

🖐️ **“Dirshu” Gemara Shiur**
(Maseches B'choros)
Rabbi Yitzchok Preis.....
Sunday 7:15–8:15 AM
Monday–Friday 5:50–6:45 AM

🖐️🖐️ **Kollel Yisgaber K'ari**
(amud-a-day of Mishnah B'rurah)
Rabbi Chaim Heinemann.....
Monday–Friday 6:55–7:20 AM

🖐️🖐️ **Kitzur Shuchan Aruch**
Live video conference!
Rabbi Dani Schon.....
Monday–Friday 12:05–12:20 PM

🖐️ **Daf Yomi**
Rabbi Meir Minster.....
Sunday–Thursday 8–8:45 PM
Shabbos (at CZE) 1:00 pre-mincha

🖐️🖐️ **Nightly Halacha Chabura**
Rabbis Dani Schon
& Binyamin Teitelbaum
Monday–Thursday 9–9:45 PM

Chavrusa Learning
(private & small groups).....times vary

Assembling a Congregation CONTINUED

going to dispute, fight, and quarrel, or are we going to have *achdus*, unity, and love for one another? Are we going to be divisive, or are we going to recognize each other's uniqueness and appreciate and respect one another? Are we going to hit one another (strictly metaphorically speaking, of course), or are we going to properly speak to others, to allow them to give forth their “water,”—*meimav* (verse 8)—to express their own greatness?

May we make the right choices and always recognize that everything comes from The One Above. May we always learn, grow, and be united, so that we may merit to be elevated from an *eidah*

to a *kahal*. And may we merit to serve Hashem in the Holy Temple, in the refined manner worthy of a *kahal*, speedily in our days! 🙏



*This week
at the
Kollel*

*“Thank you!” to the
Bernstein, Edelman, Ottensoser, Schwartzberg, & Zuroff families,
for sponsoring the boys' learning program for the past two weeks.*