

Dvar Torah - Veyeira

What's the difference between sand and the stars?

Immediately after the Akeida, Hashem gave Avraham a wonderful blessing: 'Ve-harbah arbeh et zaracha k'chochvei hashamyim v'chachol asher al sfat hayam' I shall significantly increase the number of your offspring so they will be like the stars in the heavens above and like the sand which by the seashore.

Why this repetition?

Surely we don't need both examples? Both the stars in the heavens above and the sand by the seashore, indicate a number so high that nobody could count them. The Midrash helps us, by saying that when Hashem says that the Jewish people will be like the stars above, that refers to a time when we are loyal to the words of Hashem. And that we'll be like the grains of sand on the seashore below - that's when we rebel against the words of Hashem. The Midrash explains that one cannot touch the stars - they are safe, they are secure and that represents the people of Israel in good times, whereas sand is trampled underfoot and that represents the people of Israel in challenging times.

I'm troubled by this peirush because the context here is one of pure blessing. It's in the immediate aftermath of the greatest statement of faith in God - the akeidah. Hashem wants to reassure Avraham that thanks to the loyalty that we the Jewish people place in God above, He will forever bless us. So therefore both the stars and the sands must indicate blessing and therefore I'd like to suggest the following...

Like the stars in the heavens above - that means innumerable. Like the sand on the seashore is different. It's not just 'Chol - sand'. It's 'chol asher al-tsfat hayam' - sand by the seashore, which is wet, like mud. It appears as one single entity.

Though it is made up of separate grains, they are clasped together as one. This is a further blessing! In addition to being like the stars above, Hashem is saying that the Jewish people will be blessed with unity. Each individual will retain his or her own unique identity but we will stand together as one great nation.

Through the ages, God has indeed blessed us to survive together as a nation, against the odds. And true to his word we have been like the stars of the heavens above.

Let us help Hashem to bless us just as the sand which is by the seashore and guarantee that we will always have unity within our midst.

Shabbat Shalom