

“Will not the Judge of all the World, do justice?” These are the words with which Abraham challenged God, words which Kelsey will chant for us tomorrow morning. They begin a sequence in which Abraham negotiates with God, bargaining with God for the cities of Sodom and Gemorrah. Abraham begins with 50 righteous, and then works his way down, to 45, 40, 30, 20 and finally ten.

But why did he stop there? What was so special about 10?

In the “who knows one” song, ten is for the commandments, but it also could have been for the utterances with which the world was created in the first chapter of Genesis, or for the number required for a minyan. By tradition that is not derived from this text but from the story of the spies Moses sent out. Two of them remain loyal but ten of them lead the people astray. This group of ten is called Eidah, congregation, and so when in Leviticus it talks about God being sanctified in the Eidah, in the congregation, our tradition concluded that there must be at least ten adults present.

For generations, that meant men, but in the year of my birth the Conservative movement gave permission but did not require the counting of women. Today even some of the Orthodox count women in the so called “partnership” minyans which require ten of each.

The minyan is a reflection of the communal nature of Judaism. You aren't a Jew by yourself. So much of being Jewish depends on being with other people, people with whom to share holidays and lifecycle events; even grieving in the Jewish tradition requires the presence of others. That is where being part of a congregation comes in- we hope to be the community in your lives and to help enable you to do Jewish.

There is also another aspect to the ten. Long before social psychologists had done studies on peer pressure, our tradition recognized that it is difficult to maintain your beliefs alone, in the face of an entire society. Lot is an example of this. He was raised up in Abraham's household and clearly had values. He extends hospitality to the visitors, and the midrash tells us that his daughter offered bread to the poor, at the cost of her life. Yet his values had gotten messed up and he offered his daughters to the mob outside his door. About Lot the midrash tells this story.

Lot would go every day to the city gate and decry the cruelty and selfishness of the city. One man noticed him doing this, day after day, without making any impact. He went up to Lot and said, why do you keep speaking out? You are not

changing anyone else's mind? No, he admitted. I am not changing their minds, but I am keeping them from changing my mind.

Our tradition recognized what contemporary studies have found. Alone very few people can hold onto their beliefs, even about something as obvious as which line is longer. But if a person has a few compatriots, even in the face of overwhelming opposition, they can hold onto their views. A minyan helps us hold on to our Jewish values when they are countercultural. It provides us with the support that allows us to continue to hold a minority position.

Finally, there is one more observation about the minyan. Though it is about community, it affirms the value of each person. One person makes all the difference. 9 rabbis don't make a minyan we are reminded, but when the tenth person arrives, even if they are neither a scholar nor a saint, the tenth makes the minyan. Each person matters in our community and one person can make all the difference.