

Toras Aish

Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

RABBI LORD JONATHAN SACKS

Covenant & Conversation

Near the end of Va'etchanan is a statement with such far-reaching implications that it challenges the impression that has prevailed thus far in the Torah. This remark gives an entirely new complexion to the biblical image of the people Israel: "The Lord did not set His affection on you and choose you because you were more numerous than other peoples, for you are the fewest of all peoples" (Deut. 7:7).

This is not what we have heard thus far. In Genesis, God promised the patriarchs that their descendants would be like the stars of the heaven, the sand on the seashore, the dust of the earth, uncountable. Abraham will be the father, not just of one nation but of many. At the beginning of Exodus we read of how the covenantal family, numbering a mere seventy when they went down to Egypt, were "fertile and prolific, and their population increased. They became so numerous that the land was filled with them" (Ex. 1:7). Three times in the book of Deuteronomy, Moses describes the Israelites as being "as many as the stars of the sky" (1:10; 10:22; 28:62). King Solomon speaks of himself as being part of "the people You have chosen, a great people, too numerous to count or number" (I Kings 3:8). The prophet Hosea says that "the Israelites will be like the sand on the seashore, which cannot be measured or counted" (Hos. 2:1).

In all these texts and others it is the size, the numerical greatness, of the people that is emphasised. What then are we to make of Moses' words that speak of its smallness? Targum Yonatan interprets it not to be about numbers at all but about self-image. He translates it not as "the fewest of all peoples" but as "the most lowly and humble of peoples." Rashi gives a similar reading, citing Abraham's words, "I am but dust and ashes" (Gen. 18:27), and Moses and Aaron's, "Who are we?" (Ex. 16:7).

Rashbam and Chizkuni give the more straightforward explanation that Moses is contrasting the Israelites with the seven nations they would be fighting in the land of Canaan/Israel. God would lead the Israelites to victory despite the fact that they were outnumbered by the local inhabitants. Rabbeinu Bachya quotes Maimonides, who says that we would have expected God, King of the universe, to have chosen the most numerous nation in the world as His

people, since "the glory of the King is in the multitude of people" (Prov. 14:28). God did not do so. Thus Israel should count itself extraordinarily blessed that God chose it, despite its smallness, to be His *am segula*, His special treasure.

Rabbeinu Bachya finds himself forced to give a more complex reading to resolve the contradiction of Moses, in Deuteronomy, saying both that Israel is the smallest of peoples and "as many as the stars of the sky" (Gen. 22:17). He turns it into a hypothetical subjunctive, meaning: God would still have chosen you, even if you had been the smallest of the peoples.

Sforno gives a simple and straightforward reading: God did not choose a nation for the sake of His honour. Had He done so He would undoubtedly have chosen a mighty and numerous people. His choice had nothing to do with honour and everything to do with love. He loved the patriarchs for their willingness to heed His voice; therefore He loves their children.

Yet there is something in this verse that resonates throughout much of Jewish history. Historically Jews were and are a small people -- today, less than 0.2 per cent of the population of the world. There were two reasons for this. First is the heavy toll taken through the ages by exile and persecution, directly by Jews killed in massacres and pogroms, indirectly by those who converted -- in fourteenth -- and fifteenth-century Spain and nineteenth-century Europe -- in order to avoid persecution (tragically, even conversion did not work; racial antisemitism persisted in both cases). The Jewish population is a mere fraction of what it might have been had there been no Hadrian, no Crusades, and no antisemitism.

The second reason is that Jews did not seek to convert others. Had they done so they would have been closer in numbers to Christianity (2.4 billion) or Islam (1.6 billion). In fact, Malbim reads something like this into our verse. The previous verses have said that the Israelites were about to enter a land with seven nations, Hittites, Girgashites, Amorites, Canaanites, Perizzites, Hivites, and Jebusites. Moses warns them against intermarriage with the other nations, not for racial but for religious reasons: "They will turn your children away from following Me to serve other gods" (Deut. 7:4). Malbim interprets our verse as Moses saying to the Israelites: Do not justify out-marriage on the grounds that it will increase the number of Jews.

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NEWSLETTER DISTRIBUTED VIA EMAIL
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God is not interested in numbers.

Notwithstanding all these interpretations and explanations, Tanach itself offers one extraordinary episode that sheds a different light on the whole issue. It occurs in the seventh chapter of the book of Judges. God has told Gideon to assemble an army and do battle with the Midianites. He gathers a force of 32,000 men. God tells him, "You have too many men. I cannot deliver Midian into their hands, or Israel would boast against Me, 'My own strength has saved me'" (Judges 7:2).

God tells Gideon to say to the men: Whoever is afraid and wishes to go home may do so. Twenty-two thousand men leave. Ten thousand remain. God tells Gideon, "There are still too many men." He proposes a new test. Gideon is to take the men to a river and see how they drink the water. Ninety-seven hundred kneel down to drink, and are dismissed. Gideon is left with a mere three hundred men. "With the three hundred men that lapped [the water] I will save you and give the Midianites into your hands," God tells him (Judges 7:1-8). By a brilliant and unexpected strategy, the three hundred put the entire Midianite army to flight.

The Jewish people are small but have achieved great things to testify in themselves to a force beyond themselves. It has achieved things no other nation its size could have achieved. Its history has been living testimony to the force of Divine Providence and the impact of high ideals. That is what Moses meant when he said: "Ask now about the former days, long before your time, from the day God created human beings on the earth; ask from one end of the heavens to the other. Has anything so great as this ever happened, or has anything like it ever been heard of? Has any other people heard the voice of God speaking out of fire, as you have, and lived? Has any god ever tried to take for himself one nation out of another nation, by testings, by signs and wonders, by war, by a mighty hand and an outstretched arm, or by great and awesome deeds, like all the things the Lord your God did for you in Egypt before your very eyes?" (Deut. 4:32-34)

Israel defies the laws of history because it serves the Author of history. Attached to greatness, it becomes great. Through the Jewish people, God is telling humankind that you do not need to be numerous

to be great. Nations are judged not by their size but by their contribution to human heritage. Of this the most compelling proof is that a nation as small as the Jews could produce an ever-renewed flow of prophets, priests, poets, philosophers, sages, saints, halachists, aggadists, codifiers, commentators, rebbes, and rashei yeshivot. It has also yielded some of the world's greatest writers, artists, musicians, filmmakers, academics, intellectuals, doctors, lawyers, businesspeople, and technological innovators. Out of all proportion to their numbers, Jews could and can be found working as lawyers fighting injustice, economists fighting poverty, doctors fighting disease, teachers fighting ignorance, and therapists fighting depression and despair.

You do not need numbers to enlarge the spiritual and moral horizons of humankind. You need other things altogether: a sense of the worth and dignity of the individual, of the power of human possibility to transform the world, of the importance of giving everyone the best education they can have, of making each feel part of a collective responsibility to ameliorate the human condition. Judaism asks of us the willingness to take high ideals and enact them in the real world, unswayed by disappointments and defeats.

This is still evident today, especially among the people of Israel in the State of Israel. Traduced in the media and pilloried by much of the world, Israel continues to produce human miracles in medicine, agriculture, technology, and the arts, as if the word "impossible" did not exist in the Hebrew language. Israel remains a small nation, surrounded, as in biblical times, by "nations larger and stronger than you" (Deut. 7:1). Yet the truth remains, as Moses said: "The Lord did not set His affection on you and choose you because you were more numerous than other peoples, for you are the fewest of all peoples."

This small people has outlived all the world's great empires to deliver to humanity a message of hope: you need not be large to be great. What you need is to be open to a power greater than yourself. It is said that King Louis XIV of France once asked Blaise Pascal, the brilliant mathematician and theologian, to give him proof of the existence of God. Pascal is said to have replied, "Your Majesty, the Jews!" *Covenant and Conversation 5779 is kindly supported by the Maurice Wohl Charitable Foundation in memory of Maurice and Vivienne Wohl z"l ©2019 Rabbi Lord J. Sacks and rabbisacks.org*

RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN

Shabbat Shalom

"**A**nd I [Moses] entreated the Lord at that time, saying, 'let me pass over the [the River Jordan] please so that I may see the good land.'" (Deuteronomy 3:23, 25) Moses places two entreaties before the Lord at the end of his life

concerning the leadership of the Jewish people in the Land of Israel: one is right here, in which he asks that he be allowed “to cross over and see the good land beyond the Jordan River” and presumably continue to lead the Israelites. This entreaty to lead, although not made directly, is implied in God’s response: “You must command Joshua, strengthen him and give him resolve, for he shall cross before this nation and shall bring them to inherit the land” (Deut. 3:28). The second request came earlier, in the biblical portion of Pinehas, and is not at all stated by Moses directly. It is merely inferred by the sages of the Midrash, since Moses requests of God to appoint his successor right after the Bible informs us that the daughters of Tzelafhad can inherit their father (Num. 27:11). It is then that Moses requests, “Let the Lord God of the spirits of all flesh appoint a leader over the witness assembly” (27:15–16). Listen to the words of the Midrash: What caused Moses to request his replacement after the inheritance of the daughters? Since these daughters inherited their father, Moses declared, “This is the right moment for me to claim my need. After all, if these women can inherit [their father] my sons should certainly inherit my glory.” The Holy One, blessed be He said to him: “The guardian of the fig tree shall eat of its fruit” [Prov. 27:18]. Your sons sat idly by themselves and were not occupied in the study of Torah. Joshua, on the other hand, served you well and extended to you much honor. He would arrive at your courthouse early in the morning and leave late at night.... Appoint Joshua the son of Nun as your successor, to fulfill the verse, “the guardian of the fig tree shall eat of its fruit.”

Hence, Moses’ two requests: the explicit plea to God that he be allowed to enter the Land of Israel and, presumably, lead them himself, and the implicit plea that God appoint his sons as his successors.

Both requests are denied. The first, his children as his successors, is denied because his sons are found wanting; they did not have the necessary Torah qualifications to be religious leaders in their father’s footsteps. Very likely, Moses himself realizes their lack of worthiness and therefore does not specifically make this request verbally; he merely thinks it in his heart, and the Bible informs us of his heart’s desire by placing his request for replacement after the inheritance of the daughters of Tzelafhad. Perhaps Moses understands that he himself bears some guilt for the flaws in his children. After all, he is so consumed with his relationship with the Divine that he doesn’t seem to have the time or the patience for family. Does the Bible not record that he was seemingly too busy to even circumcise his son Eliezer, so that his life had to be saved by his wife Tzipora who performed the circumcision herself in order to save Moses from punishment for his neglect (Ex. 4:24–26)?

Moses apparently is more comfortable making the second request – that he be allowed to enter the

Promised Land. It is this entreaty which opens our portion of Va’ethanan. The entire purpose of the Exodus from Egypt is to enter the Land of Israel. After all of his sacrifices and all of his difficulties with an unwilling and backsliding Israelite nation, does he not deserve to reach his life’s goal, enter the Land of Israel, and begin this new era of Jewish history with himself as their leader?

But here again the request is denied: “And the Lord was angry at me because of you and He did not accept my plea...saying that I may not speak of this anymore” (Deut. 3:26). Perhaps the rejection of both requests emanates from the same source, and it is Moses who is really blaming himself. Remember that when God had originally asked Moses to assume the leadership of the Israelites and take them out, the great prophet demurred, claiming to be “heavy of speech” (literally, *kevad peh*) (Ex. 4:10). And then the Bible testifies that “the [Israelites] did not listen to Moses [about leaving Egypt] because of impatience and difficult work” (6:9). Most commentators explain that the Hebrews were impatient and had no energy to resist their slavery; the hard work of servitude sapped their inner strength and prevented them from even dreaming about freedom. But Ralbag (1288–1344) explains this to mean that it was because of Moses’ impatience with his people (the Hebrews), because of his (Moses’) difficult work in making himself intellectually and spiritually close to the Divine.

Moses was into the “heavy talk” of communication with God and receiving the divine words. He did not have the interest or patience to get into the small talk, the necessary public relations of establishing personal ties and convincing Hebrew after Hebrew that it was worthwhile to rebel against Egypt and conquer the Land of Israel. He didn’t even have the patience to slowly and lovingly bring along his children and make them his deputies. He was a God-person, not a people-person, or even a family-person. He’s not blaming them, he is ultimately blaming himself. He spent his time communicating with God and receiving His divine words for all the generations; as a result, he sacrificed his ability to move his generation to accept God’s command to enter the Promised Land. A leader must join in the destiny of his people. If they could not enter the land, even if it was because of their own backsliding, he may not enter the land, because he did not succeed in inspiring them sufficiently well.

In the final analysis, why were these two prayers denied the greatest leader in Jewish history? Apparently, it is because the very source of Moses’ greatness – his lofty spirit and closeness to God – was what prevented him from getting down to the level of his congregation and family to lift them up. Moses succeeded like no one else before or after him in communicating God’s word for all future generations; but he did not do as well with his own generation.

Hence his words are honest and very much to the point: "The Lord was angry at me because of you" – because I did not have sufficient time to deal with you on a personal level, to nurture and empower you until you were ready to accept God's teachings and conquer the Promised Land.

In addition to all this, perhaps Moses' requests were denied in order to teach us that no mortal, not even Moses, leaves this world without at least half of his desires remaining unfulfilled. And perhaps he was refused merely to teach us that no matter how worthy our prayer, sometimes the Almighty answers "No" and we must accept a negative answer. Faith, first and foremost, implies our faithfulness to God even though at the end of the day, He may refuse our request.

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RABBI BEREL WEIN

Wein Online

The Torah reading of this week always coincides with the Shabbat that falls after the fast of the ninth day of Av. Because of the nature of the prophetic reading, it is seen as the Shabbat of comfort and consolation, which are difficult commodities to acquire. Tragedies are not easily erased from one's mind and affect one's permanent personality and view of life. Comfort and consolation rarely come from outside sources, that are almost completely dependent upon the personality and psychological makeup of the one who has suffered the tragedy.

The Torah is always realistic about human nature and never provides simplistic or instantaneously magical solutions to personal problems and difficulties. Rather, consolation is to be viewed as a process of maturity and development. Tragedies are never really forgotten but they can be sublimated by future events and experiences of life that follow.

The narrative of this week's reading has Moshe attempting to convince Heaven, so to speak, to reverse its decree and to allow him to enter and live in the land of Israel. His request is denied. The Torah never records for us whether Moshe is truly ever consoled over this event and his fate. Nevertheless, for the balance of this book of Dvarim, Moshe continues to fulfill his mission as the leader of the Jewish people and the greatest of all prophets. Even when one is not completely comforted, one must continue with a positive mission in life and not use the disappointments and tragedies that eventually beset all of us as an excuse for depression.

The Jewish people unfortunately have a long list of complaints, grievances and tragedies that litter our historical narrative. Though we have many great achievements to balance the ledger sheet of history, the ninth day of Av reminded us that we have never been completely comforted and consoled. Even in our day, the great accomplishment of the creation and

success of the state of Israel and the miraculous in gathering of Jews from all over the world to populate our country, gives us hope and stamina to face the future and its challenges. But in no way, does it come to provide comfort and consolation for the destruction of European Jewry in the past century.

It is obvious that tragedy, resilience and accomplishment exist side-by-side within us individually and as a nation. Our great prophets assure us that we will be healed from our wounds and restored to greatness. But, just as one who undergoes surgery and is restored to full health, nevertheless he bears the scars of that surgery for the rest of his life. So too, comfort and consolation of the Jewish people is not meant to remove the scars of what has happened to us over our long and many times painful history. The task is to move on, and this attitude and behavior eventually brings about healing as part of the process of consolation. ©2019 Rabbi Berel Wein - Jewish historian, author and international lecturer offers a complete selection of CDs, audio tapes, video tapes, DVDs, and books on Jewish history at www.rabbiwein.com. For more information on these and other products visit www.rabbiwein.com

RABBI AVI WEISS

Shabbat Forshpeis

Without the world, what would God be? The answer is simply, God. On the other hand, without God, the world would cease to exist.

God is so powerful that without the world He would not be reduced one iota. In the same breath, God's immanence is such that without Him the world would be nothing.

Rashi enhances this idea through his interpretation of the famous sentence found in this week's portion, Shema Yisrael Hashem Elokeinu Hashem Ehad – "Hear O Israel the Lord is our God the Lord is One." (Deuteronomy 6:4)

In the words of Rashi, the verse comes to tell us that "Hashem, the Lord, who is our God, now...He will be in the future One Lord, as it is stated... 'in that day shall the Lord be One and His name One.'" (Zachariah 14:9)

The implication is clear: God in the world today is not fully One in the sense that he has not been accepted by all of humankind. It is up to us, who know of God's greatness, to spread the name of God so that He will be received as One throughout the world.

The second paragraph of the well known Aleinu prayer makes this very point. There we yearn for the time when "the world will be perfected under the reign of the Almighty, le-takein olam be-malkhut Shakai" and all humankind will express allegiance to God. "On that day," the paragraph continues, quoting the sentence from Zachariah which Rashi understands as an explanation of Shema, "God will be One, and His name One." Note that the whole paragraph is in the future,

implying that in the present God is not One in the sense that He has not been embraced by all.

This idea is also echoed in the text about Amalek where God swears by His name and throne that He will forever war against Amalek. God's name and throne are written uniquely as they are incomplete in the text —keis, Kah. (Exodus 17:16) Indeed, Rashi writes: "The Holy One blessed be He swears that His name and throne will not be whole and One until Amalek will be utterly blotted out."

Once again it is up to the human being, with God's help, to eradicate Amalek or the forces of Amalek. In this sense, while God does not need the human being-- as He is, of course, independent and self-existent-- we have a strong and important role in His future. For only through the efforts of humankind will His name be One and His throne be complete.

In one word: while the existence of God does not at all depend upon humankind, the manifestation of God and the proliferation of the Divine message in this world very much depends on each and every one of us.

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RABBI DAVID LEVINE

Question of the Wise Son

It might appear strange, but Parashat V'etchanan contains the question that we know from our Hagaddah is asked by the Wise Son. I say strange because the questions of the Wicked son and the Simple Son are found where we would most expect them, namely in Parashat Bo in Sefer Sh'mot where they are discussed in the context of Pesach and the Exodus. Since there is no question for the Son Who Does Not Know How To Ask, that means that this is the only question which does not occur in a discussion of Pesach or in Sefer Sh'mot. One who is familiar with the questions and the answers given in the Hagaddah will also be aware that the answers given to the sons in the Torah do not match the answers given to the sons in the Hagaddah.

Let us first examine the p'sukim involved. "When your son will ask you tomorrow (in the future) 'what are the testimonies, and the statutes, and the ordinances that Hashem, our Elokim, commanded you?' And you will say to your son, 'we were slaves to Pharaoh in Egypt and Hashem took us out of Egypt with a strong hand. And Hashem gave signs and wonders, great and harmful, against Egypt against Pharaoh and against his entire household before our eyes. And He took us out of there in order to bring us to give us the land that He promised to our forefathers. And Hashem commanded us to do all these statutes, to fear Hashem our Elokim for our good all the days to give us life as this very day. And it will be a merit for us

if we are careful to perform this entire commandment before Hashem our Elokim as He commanded us.'"

We must view this section from the Torah in its context. The section which precedes these p'sukim deals with a promise and a warning from Hashem. Hashem promises to bring the B'nei Yisrael into the land where they will live in cities that they did not build and dwell in houses that are filled with good things that they did not fill. They will find cisterns that they did not hew and orchards and olive trees that they did not plant. This is followed by a warning not to forget that it was Hashem Who did this for them and Who took them out of the land of Egypt. There then follows almost an exact duplicate of the sentences that are from our section. Why then are the words repeated in our section? The first section is a promise and a warning to the fathers which concludes with the responsibility to fulfill the mitzvot. That conditional promise is then fresh in the mind of the father when his son will ask what Hashem commanded them to do. HaRav Shimshon Raphael Hirsch explains the connection of these p'sukim. The section immediately preceding our p'sukim "reminded us not to demand continuous miracles from Hashem to fortify ever afresh our conviction of the Presence of Hashem in our midst, but to be certain forever of His Presence by reason of the nisim (miracles) with which the history of the establishment of our nation was filled, and that we could expect the manifestation of it only by our dutiful devotion to that which in Hashem's eyes was right and good."

HaRav Zalman Sorotzkin explains the similar answer of, "and you shall teach your children on that day saying", that we give the Wicked and the Son Who Does Not Know to Ask. He says that it is obvious that the last Son is under the influence of the Wicked Son. He has the same feelings of rebellion only he is too afraid or incapable of speaking his mind. The father notices and says to the Wicked Son, "because of this that Hashem did for me when He took me out of Egypt." He then points to the Rasha with his finger and says "for me and not for him, if he had been there he would not have been saved." The father intends those last words to have an effect on the last son. The Wicked Son is only impressed by miracles and will follow Hashem only so long as He continues those miracles. Compare this attitude to that of the Wise Son.

We have yet to deal with the separation of this question from the other questions of the sons. If we look at the Wise Son's question, "What are these testimonies, statutes, and ordinances that Hashem our Elokim commanded you," we see that it could not have been asked prior to the giving of those various types of laws. (Parashat Bo is two parshiot before the receiving of the Torah in Parashat Yitro.) Still, why was it necessary to separate these questions by forty years? We must remember that the B'nei Yisrael only

celebrated one Pesach in the wilderness and that was one year after the first Pesach in Egypt. They are now about to enter the Holy Land and celebrate their third Pesach. Sorotzkin explains that the Wise Son turns to his father and says, "teach me the testimonies, statutes, and laws that you witnessed being given or that you have as a tradition handed down by your father to you." He no longer expects the daily miracles that accompanied the B'nei Yisrael through the desert. He feels he must learn the laws now before entering the land so that he may observe them properly. In that way he will enable the B'nai Yisrael to remain in that land.

If we look towards the beginning of our parasha, we find an interesting group of sentences which reinforce our ideas: "See I have taught you statutes and ordinances as Hashem my Elokim has commanded me that you should do accordingly in the midst of the land to which you are coming to take it into possession. And you will guard them (the mitzvot) and fulfill them for that is your wisdom and your insight in the eyes of the nations who will hear all of these statutes and will say, 'it is after all a wise and understanding people, this great nation.'" The Wise Son is a reflection of this section because he understands that it is our observation of these mitzvot which will ensure our permanence in the land.

The study of Torah is fascinating and always proves to be challenging. But to study the Torah only as a fascination would lose the importance of the Torah itself. We must strive to be like the Wise Son and study the Torah so that we can perfect our observance of the mitzvot. In that way we will enable Hashem to fulfill His promises to the B'nei Yisrael of a life of Peace and prosperity in our Land. ©2019 Rabbi D. Levine

ENCYCLOPEDIA TALMUDIT

Intermarriage

*Translated for the Encyclopedia Talmudit
by Rabbi Mordechai Weiss*

In this week's portion the Torah states "And I will deliver them from before you....You shall not intermarry with them; you shall not give your daughter to his son, and you shall not take his daughter for your son, for he will cause your child to turn away from after Me". Our sages in the Talmud argue as to whom this was referring. Our Rabbis state that this prohibition of the Torah applies only to the seven nations that were enumerated in the Torah and that lived in the land of Canaan, while Rabbi Shimon states that it applies to all Gentile nations because it deals with intermarriage. Rabbi Shimon's reasoning is based on the superfluous words "Ki Yassir" ("and he will cause your child to turn away from me"), in which he interprets to include all the nations of the world even if they do not indulge in idolatry.

Our Rabbis also believe that one is prohibited to intermarry with all nations, although they base this

prohibition as Rabbinic and not Torah based, as it appears in the book of Nechemiah, when Ezra states "And we will not give our daughters to the people of this land nor will we take their daughters for our sons"(Nechemiah 10,31).

There are those however, who believe that this sentence as it appears in the book of Nechemiah is based on a Torah prohibition since the decree by the Rabbis against intermarriage did not appear until much later during the time of the Chashmonaim.

Our Rabbis forbade many things that might promote intermarriage such as cooking for a Jew by a non-Jew, and the prohibition of Intermarriage sited in this week's portion. However there are those sages who state that it is not only the prohibition of intermarriage that we are concerned with, but also the adoption of the traditions of the Non-Jews. ©2016 Rabbi M. Weiss and Encyclopedia Talmudit

RABBI PINCHAS WINSTON

Perceptions

"You have been shown, in order to KNOW that God He is God; there is none else besides Him." (Devarim 4:35) It is amazing the difference that knowledge makes. I realize this is an obvious thing to say, since everything in life depends upon what we know. Nonetheless, there is something not-so-obvious about it, because a PHENOMENAL amount of people choose ignorance instead, seemingly believing that "ignorance IS bliss."

Knowledge is THE game changer of game changers. It constantly saves lives, and the lack of knowledge will constantly cost them. Money can't buy happiness, but knowledge can. Money can't buy love, but knowledge constantly builds it. You can't love someone you don't know.

You can idolize strangers, but you can't LOVE them. That takes knowledge, and the more intimate that knowledge is of something, the more you can love it. Infatuation doesn't require much knowledge, and can happen at "first sight." True love NEVER does. It's just the way the world works.

And this thing about a little knowledge being a dangerous thing, is only to encourage us to go the full distance and get ALL the knowledge we can. There is one thing worse than an ignoramus, and that is a PARTIAL ignoramus. An ignoramus knows he has nothing to offer on what he knows nothing about. A partial ignoramus thinks he knows enough to have an opinion when in fact he usually doesn't.

This is VERY evident from reading Yirmiyahu about the destruction of the First Temple, and the exile that followed. Not only was Yirmiyahu ignored, but he was persecuted by the very people he was trying to save. For a prophet of God, he had a very rough time of it. He got to say, "I told you so," because everything he had forewarned about had come true. But it wasn't

about being right for Yirmiyahu. It was about getting the Jewish people back on track, and avoiding destruction and exile. Being proven right only meant to him that he had failed in his mission.

HOW? How could so many people take a prophet of God for granted, even abuse him? How could they throw caution to the wind, and risk so much terrible Divine retribution? EICHAH? How?

Well, how did Adam HaRishon go against the command of God, and risk death to eat from the Aitz HaDa'as Tov v'Ra? God had not spoken in riddles or parables. Which part of "Do not eat or you will die" did Adam not get? And yet he ate anyhow, and here we are, almost 6,000 years later and no closer to returning to Paradise. HOW?

In the Garden of Eden, there was the snake, that crafty little MISinformation deliverer. He spoke in half-truths and outright lies, and took advantage of what Chava DIDN'T know. He turned God into the enemy, made himself out like a hero, and Adam into a naf.

In Yirmiyahu's time, it was the FALSE prophets. Even though the Torah warns about them, and even threatens them with the death penalty, they were rampant in the time right before the destruction of the Temple. They pumped the nation full of good news and upbeat prophecies, despite the fact they kept sinning in the worst ways possible. People listen more readily to what they WANT to hear, and more easily reject what they don't.

The true enemy of society is stupidity. It's not a nice word, and actually quite insulting. But even Tanach uses it to describe the intellectual state of the people of Yirmiyahu's time. It wasn't saying the people were unintelligent. It was saying that they were STUPID. UNINTELLIGENT means a person lacks knowledge. STUPID means they have the knowledge, but they ignore it, or undervalue it.

For example, when a three year old goes zooming down a hill without wearing a helmet on his little toy, it is usually due to a lack of intelligence. He just hasn't learned enough about road safety, and how an accident can hurt him badly or worse, God forbid.

When a teenager does it on his bicycle, he is acting stupid. He should know better, but chooses to ignore the information that could save his life and those of others. He has STUPIDLY risked lives for the sake of a bodily thrill, HOPING that nothing will go wrong. The Emergency Room is filled with those for whom hope, and their bodies, weren't strong enough.

Likewise, when "adults" take incredible risks while driving cars, putting too much trust in their cars, other people, and their own skills, they are REALLY acting stupid. They definitely should know better, but have chosen, for personal convenience sake, to bypass their wisdom and do the stupid thing.

I'm not just being facetious. I'm standing on this point because it means a lot more than people think,

but ought to know. Adam's punishment was more severe than Chava's because he knew better, and she did not. She had not heard the command from God, and what she heard through her husband was somewhat convoluted. She was only punished for what she DID know, and ignored, as was he.

Likewise, Yirmiyahu's generation would have enjoyed more mercy had they only been unintelligent. God never holds a person responsible for what they don't know, unless they CHOOSE not to know it. The Temple was destroyed, and the people were horribly exiled, because they had acted STUPIDLY, not unintelligently.

This discussion has major ramifications, especially today, especially for Jews. We're living in an era that has made being unintelligent next to impossible, at least wherever there is Internet. We have been called the "Generation of Knowledge," the first one to be called that since the original "Dor HaDayah," the generation that left Egypt and heard God speak.

A big problem today is the quality of knowledge. There is a lot of misinformation. TONS of it. But there are also TONS of ways to overcome it. "Still a man hears what he wants to hear and disregards the rest." And even though people often know this they STUPIDLY disregard it. Tisha B'Av only becomes Tu B'Av when we realize this, and change. The day can get pushed off, and eventually be over. Life can pick up where it left off before the Three Weeks, and give a person the impression that all the danger is gone, over. Just like the false prophets of Yirmiyahu's time told the people...who later cursed them, and their own stupidity, as they were carted off like cattle to Babylonia.

The Torah, in the parsha of "Shabbos Nachamu," states clearly: "You have been shown, in order to KNOW that God He is God; there is none else besides Him." (Devarim 4:35)

WHO was shown? Not us. Moshe's generation, but not ours. THEY can be held responsible for THEIR unwarranted mistakes, but not us...right? Jewish history says otherwise, and current history agrees. Once upon a time, there was a great lack of intelligence, which is why God probably had a lot of patience with the world. But our greatest asset is also our greatest liability if we don't appreciate it for what it is. We're a HIGHLY intelligent generation. But that makes the stupid things we do STUPID, and punishable. It's Tisha B'Av all year round when that is the case.

The comfort that these weeks speak about were AFTER the Jewish people had received the shocking news about just how wrong they were, and about just how much damage it had caused. It woke them up to reality, and made them open to comfort, and rebuilding. But we're still before that point, thanks to God's great patience and mercy. It has bought us time, but not a free pass. If we wake ourselves up to the truth, and help others to do the same, then we can

have our comfort and enjoy it too. Let's figure out HOW -- eichah -- we got "here," and steer ourselves as we were "shown to know." ©2019 Rabbi P. Winston and torah.org

RABBI MENASHE WEISS

Shabbat Shalom Weekly

The Torah states: "And you shall do that which is right and good in the sight of the Lord" (Deuteronomy 6:18). What does this verse come to teach us?

The Ramban, Nachmanides, cites the words of our Sages who explain that this verse exhorts us to go beyond the dictates of the law in our dealings with our fellow human beings. The Ramban adds that this is a very great principle, since it is impossible for the Torah to actually list every last detail as to how a person should behave with his neighbors and friends.

The Talmud (Bava Metzia 30b) states that Jerusalem was destroyed because its inhabitants failed to go beyond the letter of the law. Rabbi Zalman of Volozhin explained that this alone was not the cause of the destruction, for they had other transgressions as well. However, had they gone beyond the letter of the law in dealing with others, God would have gone beyond the letter of the law in dealing with them. Consequently, Jerusalem would have been saved (Toldos Odom).

Rabbi Eliyahu Lopian used to cite this passage during the month of Elul (the month preceding Rosh Hashanah). He added that before Rosh Hashanah everyone tries to find extra merits. From here we see that the most effective merit is to go beyond the letter of the law in our dealings with others (Lev Eliyahu).

Rabbi Yosef Hurwitz, Rosh Yeshiva of Novardok, used to say, "Someone who is lax in fulfilling matters that are beyond the obligation of the letter of the law will eventually be lax in fulfilling laws that are explicitly expressed and self-evident" (T'nuas HaMussar). *Dvar Torah based on Love Your Neighbor by Rabbi Zelig Pliskin ©2019 Rabbi M. Weiss & aish.com*

RABBI ZVI SOBOLOFSKY

TorahWeb

The degree to which the mitzvah of ahavas Hashem is fundamental to a life of Torah and mitzvos is captured in its expression in krias Shema as well as its presence in our tefillin. As we enter our homes and kiss the mezuzah we once again acknowledge the centrality of ahavas Hashem in our lives. How do we practically fulfill this core mitzvah?

There are several important aspects of avodas Hashem that are vehicles for a proper fulfillment of ahavas Hashem in our daily lives. The Rambam in the end of Hilchos Teshuva equates loving Hashem with knowing Hashem. Just as the love one feels for another person increases the better one gets to know that

person, so too the more we know Hashem the more intense our love for Him becomes. How do we attain this knowledge requisite knowledge of Hashem?

The Rambam explains that by delving into His wisdom we can know Hashem, and that wisdom is composed of two parts. First, by studying the intricacies of His creation we can attain a greater understanding of Hashem and thereby enable our love of Him to grow. In Sefer Hamitzvos the Rambam highlights that Hashem revealed the second aspect of His knowledge to us in His Torah. The greater understanding of Torah one achieves, the more one knows, and thereby loves, Hashem. This relationship between ahavas Hashem and talmud Torah appears in the Shema itself. The Sifrei, as quoted by Rashi, notes that immediately after the Torah commands us to love Hashem we are instructed to immerse ourselves in talmud Torah. It is only through a deep commitment to talmud Torah that one can reach the lofty goal of ahavas Hashem.

We usually associate ahavas Hashem with mitzvos bein adam lamakom. And yet, even our service bein adam lachaveiro depends upon internalizing our love for Hashem. Chazal interpret the mitzvah of "v'holachta b'drachav -- to walk in the path of Hashem" as the source for the mitzvah of chessed; Hashem performs countless acts of chessed and we are supposed to imitate Him. We naturally look to imitate those whom we admire. As such, by following the example of Hashem and performing acts of kindness we express our love and admiration for Him.

Ahavas Hashem also expresses itself in merging our bein adam lamakom with our bein adam lachaveiro. Chazal teach us that part of ahavas Hashem is to bring others to love Hashem. One who exemplifies ahavas Hashem and is pleasant to other human beings will encourage others to lead their lives in a similar manner. We are commanded to love Hashem with all our hearts, our souls, and our possessions. This intense love comes about from our pursuit of the knowledge of Hashem, and it is this love that results in our performance of chessed and sets the tone for our interpersonal behavior.

On a personal note, I am writing this dvar Torah as I am returning from being menachem avel two families who lost sons in Gaza. These kedoshim, as well as our other brothers who gave their lives for the entire Jewish people, have fulfilled ahavas Hashem and ahavas Yisroel in the ultimate sense, "bechol nafshecha -- with your entire soul." These young men sacrificed everything so that the Jewish people can live in safety and security. As we approach Shabbos nachamu, we extend our comfort to all of the grieving families and pray that Hashem will comfort His people by rebuilding the Beis Hamikdash and thus enable us to once again know Him even more and serve Him with maximal love. ©2014 Rabbi Z. Sobolofsky & The TorahWeb Foundation, Inc.