

ARE WE A ROLE MODEL TO THE NATIONS?

by Rabbi Yosef Kalatsky

1. Why Have We Failed as a Role Model for the World?

The Torah states, "Is it to Hashem that you do this, O vile and unwise people? Is He not your Father, your Master? Has He not created you and firmed you?" The Targum Onkeles explains that the wisdom of the Jewish people is the Torah because it is Hashem's Wisdom and the only prescription for their spiritual development. Yet they are not wise because they do not appreciate nor adhere to it. The Midrash refers to the Torah itself as a "Chemda Ganuza - a Hidden Treasure," that preceded existence for more than 900 generations. Hashem gave it to the Klal Yisroel because they descend from the Patriarchs and have great spiritual potential. However, possessing something of such special value and not using it is the ultimate in foolishness.

On the Festivals we recite in the Amidah (Silent Prayer), "You (Hashem) have chosen us from all the peoples; You loved us and found favor in us; You exalted us above all the tongues and You sanctified us with Your Commandments..." Directly following this we recite, "Our G-d and G-d of our Forefathers, may they rise, come, reach, be noted, be favored, be heard, be considered, and remembered - the remembrance and consideration of ourselves...(the yaaleh v'yavo)." Why does this verse follow the one that describes Hashem's reasons for choosing us to be His people through the giving of the Torah?

The Yisod V'Shores HaAvodah asks if because of His love and desire for us Hashem chose the Jewish people to be His Nation, elevated us above all the other nations of the world and sanctified us through His Mitzvos - then how could we have failed to such a degree? After Hashem put the Jews on such a lofty pedestal through the Sinai experience how could we have justified not adhering to His Torah? Since we are culpable to this degree for our lack of appreciation and insensitivity for the mitzvos, we beseech Hashem to remember all the merits pertaining to Klal Yisroel as far back as the merits of the Patriarchs (Avraham, Yitzchak, and Yaakov).

Sforno explains that the Jewish people were meant to be the role model for the nations of the world through our dedication to Hashem; however, we failed in that capacity by initially worshipping the Golden Calf (Agle HaZahav). We diminished our own ability to function in this way.

It is interesting to note that until the onset of Christianity the concept of moral and ethical behavior did not exist in the non-Jewish world. The non-Jew was a barbarian and predator with no

understanding of chesed (kindness) or compassion. It is only after Christianity culled from the Torah the elements of humanism and disseminated it to the masses did they have a semblance of moral and ethical beings. However, the role of the Jew vis-à-vis the world at large goes beyond being the moral and ethical model.

The Jew's ethical and moral behavior and communal responsibilities are Divinely Ordained just as all of the other precepts of the Torah. Observing Shabbos and dietary laws, as well as giving charity to the poor, are all dictates of the Torah and do not emanate from the Jew's compassion or his own understanding of what is proper.

The Gemara in Tractate Berachos tells us that if a Jew realizes that he is wearing shatnez (a combination of wool and linen that is forbidden by the Torah) he must immediately remove the shatnez garment, even though he will be naked in a public setting. One may ask - how could this be, what about the issue of human dignity? The answer is that the only basis for human dignity comes from following the instructions of the Torah. If the Torah Commands us to remove our clothing because of the prohibition of wearing shatnez (regardless of the setting), then this becomes proper behavior. Human dignity means to live as Hashem wants the human being to live.

The failing of the Jew throughout the ages has been his lack of appreciation for his heritage. If he would understand the value and the purpose of his own existence relating to Hashem, he would behave differently. The ten-day period between Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, known as the Ten Days of Penitence, is a time when our prayers are received immediately (as explained by Rambam in the Laws of Teshuvah). We should pray for ourselves and for all of Klal Yisroel to have clarity, appreciate and understand our value to Hashem and re-dedicate ourselves to the Torah.

2. What is the Ultimate Rehabilitative Process of Teshuvah?

The Torah states in the beginning of Sefer Bereishis, "Bereishis bara Elokeem es ha'shamaiyim v'es ha'aretz: v'ha'aretz hoysa tohu v'vohu v'choshech al panei tahom v'ruach Elokeem merachefes al panei ha'maiyim - In the beginning of G-d's creating the heavens and the earth - when the earth was empty, with darkness upon the surface of the deep, and the Divine Presence hovered upon the surface of the waters." The Midrash explains that each of the words in this opening verse of the Torah alludes to events that will take place in the future. Meaning, when G-d created existence, He preordained that certain events will happen.

The Midrash explains that "v'ha'aretz hoysa tohu - earth was empty," refers to the Babylonian exile. "Choshech - darkness," refers to the Greek exile; as the Talmud tells us, "they blackened our eyes with their decrees." "Al panei tahom- surface of the deep" alludes to the Roman exile, which is seemingly as endless as the "deep" source of water. (We are still experiencing the Roman exile after more than 2,000 years.) "V'ruach Elokeem merachefes al panei ha'maiyim - the Divine Presence hovered upon the surface of the waters" is ascribed to the spirit of Moshiach who will come only in the merit of teshuvah (repentance) which is compared to water (maiym). As it is stated in Eicha,

"Your heart should gush forth water when you stand before Hashem." Rambam states in Hilchos Teshuvah (The Laws of Teshuvah) that the confession that one makes during teshuvah must be in the presence of Hashem. The question is what relevance does teshuvah have to water? Why is the statement "hovered upon the surface of the waters" an allusion to teshuvah?

Rambam states that if one attempts to do teshuvah but does not totally sever himself from his sinful past, then his teshuvah process is equivalent to immersing in a mikva (ritual pool) for the sake of purification, while still holding on to a rodent, which is the source of his spiritual contamination. Rambam is comparing the teshuvah process to the mikva itself. However, the verse from Eicha, which is cited by the Midrash, is indicating that the water itself is not the teshuvah but rather a consequence of the teshuvah. As it says, "your heart will gush forth water."

If one is spiritually contaminated, he must immerse himself completely in a mikvah in order to achieve spiritual purity. The Halacha (law) dictates that if there is as much as one hair of his body that is not under water, he is not purified. The desired result is only achieved when one totally dunks himself. How do we understand the purification process of the mikva? The Maharal of Prague (in his work on Chanukah) explains that humanity exists on dry land and not under water; therefore, the latter represents non-existence. When a person immerses himself in a body of water, in essence, he enters into a state of non-being. When he emerges, he enters a state of existence and is considered a "bria chadasha - a new being". As such, whatever contamination he had prior to the immersion, no longer applies to him.

Dovid HaMelech says in Tehillim (Psalms), "A broken and shattered heart Elokeem (G-d) will not disgrace." Rabbeinu Yona explains in his work Shaarei Teshuvah - The Gates of Repentance that the teshuvah process only has meaning because of the Attribute of Mercy (Midas HaRachamim). However, within the context of Midas HaDin (The attribute of Justice) there is no place for teshuvah. Dovid revealed to us that if the person is truly broken and shattered, as a result of the teshuvah process, even Elokeem (the Attribute of Justice) will not disgrace (reject) this person's teshuvah.

The Torah tells us that an earthenware vessel (after becoming contaminated) cannot be purified in a mikva. In order for it to become uncontaminated, it must be broken or shattered so it loses its function as a vessel. If it is reassembled, it is considered a new creation that does not have relevance to the original vessel - and therefore it is pure. The same holds true for a person. If he is broken and remorseful because of his sins and does teshuvah, he is forgiven because when he is broken he is the equivalent of the non-existent person. Therefore, after the process of teshuvah, the individual is a new person. Thus, because the sinner no longer exists, even the Attribute of Justice cannot prosecute the penitent.

We say in the tefillah of Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur that we are likened to a broken shard - "earthenware vessel". We identify with the purification process of the earthenware vessel because - "A broken heart Elokeem (G-d) will not disgrace."

We can now understand why the Midrash compares the process of teshuvah with water. Just as when one immerses into the water, entering into a non-existent state and he emerges pure, so too does one need to be broken and remorseful to the point that one's heart gushes forth water (tears) to indicate that he is totally broken. Thus, the "water" referred to in the Torah "hovered upon the surface of the waters" is synonymous with the broken state of man when he is in a process of teshuvah.

3. What is the Significance of the Seventy Root Nations of the World?

The Torah states, "When the Supreme One gave the nations their inheritance, when He separated the children of man, He set the borders of the peoples according to the number of the Children of Yisroel. For Hashem's portion is His people; Yaakov is the measure of His inheritance." Meaning, when Hashem established the nations of the world, He did so in accordance with the number of members of Yaakov's family who came to Egypt. The Torah tells us that the reason there are seventy nations of the world is that there were seventy individuals of Yaakov's family who descended to Egypt. How do we understand this?

The Ohr HaChaim HaKadosh explains that when Hashem created Adam (the first Man); he was created as a spiritually pure being. Because of his purity, all of his descendents would be spiritually pure. However, there existed a representation of evil in the world - the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil. When Adam ate of the Tree of Knowledge, he lost his pure state because it became intermingled with Evil. Thus, all of his decedents were born with an intermingling of Good and Evil. It was not until Yaakov Avinu (our Patriarch) that spiritual purity was reestablished because he was able to purge himself completely of the impurity, which was inherited from Adam. Consequently, Yaakov produced seventy offspring who were endowed with pure souls. With this explanation, we can understand the Gemara in Tractate Bava Metzia that tells us that the radiance of Yaakov had a semblance to the radiance of Adam. Meaning, that Yaakov possessed a purity that was similar to Adam's original state. On the contrary, the seventy nations of the world remained spirituality impaired because of the intermingling of Good and Evil. Because of their make-up, the nations of the world are diametrically opposed to the existence of Yaakov and his family - who were seventy in number.

We see that by Hashem's design, the Jewish people are meant to be the counterbalance to the nations of the world. The role of the Jew is to have a positive influence on the spirituality of the nations of the world and not to be influenced by them. This is why Hashem created seventy nations to correspond to the seventy descendents of Yaakov.

Sforno tells us at the beginning of Sefer Shemos (Book of Exodus) that when the Torah refers to the seventy descendents of Yaakov, it only identifies Yaakov's children by name and not his other descendents. Sforno explains that by identifying them by name, the Torah is indicating that each son had his own unique dimension of spirituality. Although all seventy members of Yaakov's family were

special, they were not on the same level as his twelve sons.

The Maharal in his work *Gevuras Hashem* explains that the slavery and bondage in Egypt did not commence to any degree until the passing of Yaakov Avinu. Because of Yaakov Avinu's great dimension, the Evil influences in Egypt could not erode the spiritual standing of Yaakov and his family to any degree. However, the moment Yaakov passed away, the bondage in Egypt began to evolve and was finally implemented when his entire generation passed away. It was at that time that the impurity of Egypt was able to spiritually entomb the Jewish people and cause them to lose contact with their holiness. If Hashem had not taken the Jewish people out of Egypt when He did, they would have been lost forever.

It is interesting to note that world events seem to revolve around the Jewish people, despite the fact that we are so few in number. How is it possible that billions of people take notice of an innocuous number of Jews (7 billion humans vs. 13 million Jews)? Evidently, the world at large is pitted against the essence of the Jew. There is a spiritual tug-of-war between the Jewish people and the nations of the world. This is the battle between Esav and Yaakov.

On September 11 2002, the nation and the world commemorated and memorialized the tragedy that took place a year ago. The question to ask is how have we, as Jews, changed as a result of that tragic event? We need to recognize that Hashem is reminding us that the Jews, who are the spiritual counterbalance of the world, must fulfill their role in existence. If the Jew is spiritually strong and steeped in Torah study and mitzvos, then the world is strengthened. If on the other hand the Jew is not attached to Hashem and has no interest in his spiritual development, then the world is unprotected and subject to insecurity through many tragic events. As the Torah states, Hashem created the nations of the world based on the number of the family of Yaakov, indicating that the Jew is spiritually the equivalent of all existence.

Hashem sent us a message a year ago that although we live under the protection of the most powerful nation of the world we are not safe and secure unless we are close to Him. We could have all the security measures in the world and we will still not be safe because the only way to gain security is by adhering to the Will of Hashem. As Dovid HaMelech (King David) states in Tehillim (Psalms), "If Hashem is your security, then you have security." Unfortunately, the fact is the world has not significantly changed since the tragedy of September 11. We find that most people (even most synagogue goers) believe that the most significant change in the world since September 11 is that people are a bit more courteous to one another. Is that the reason that more than 3,000 people died tragically - so that people should be able to say "good morning" with a broader smile to one another? It is absurd to diminish the significance of this tragedy in this manner. We as Jews must understand the message that our only safe-haven in this existence is to become closer to Hashem.

4. G-d Throughout the Ages Has Demonstrated His Love for Us.

It says in Selichos, "Do with us as You promised us: "And despite all that (all of our failings), when

they will be in the land of their enemies, I will not have despised them nor abhorred them to destroy them, to annul My covenant with them, for I am Hashem their G-d." Despite all of the shortcomings of the Jewish people and the many exiles and tragedies they have experienced, how did Hashem demonstrate to them that He did not "despise them nor abhor them"?

The Gemara in Tractate Megillah explains that the meaning of the verse "he did not despise them" is referring to the Babylonian exile. During this trying time He sent them Daniel, Chananya, Meshael, and Azarya. Chananya, Meshael, and Azarya were thrown into the fiery kiln because they would not bow to the image of Nebuchadnezer (the Babylonian Emperor who destroyed the First Bais HaMikdash (The Temple)). In addition, Hashem sent them Daniel who was thrown into the lion's den. Meaning, that Hashem demonstrated that He did not "despise" the Jewish people because of their sins and he sent them the gift of special Torah leaders such as Daniel, Chananiya, Meshael, and Azarya.

It continues that He did not "abhor" the Jewish people because He also sent the Hashmanaim and Mattisyahu, (who were responsible for the miracle of Chanukah), during the Greek exile. He sent Mordechai and Esther who saved them from Haman the Wicked who had decreed that every Jewish man, woman and child should be annihilated (the miracle of Purim). Had it not been for these special individuals, the Jews would have become completely assimilated or destroyed.

The Gemara concludes that the meaning of "not to annul His Covenant" is referring to the Persian exile when Hashem presented the Jewish people with Reb Yehudah HaNasi (Judah the Prince) who was the redactor of the Oral Law. The Oral interpretation of the Torah would have been forgotten had it not been for Judah the Prince compiling it into the Mishnah. We refer to Judah as, Rabbeinu Ha'Kadosh (Our Holy Rabbi). He is the only person, other than Moshe, who we call our Rabbi- "Rabbeinu" to indicate his greatness.

Although the Jewish people had many spiritual shortcomings and experienced many exiles and tragedies, Hashem nevertheless demonstrated His love for us by providing us with special Torah leadership who gave their respective generations the necessary understanding of their heritage. If it were not for these leaders, we would have been assimilated - G-d Forbid. Thus demonstrating - "...I will not have despised them nor abhorred them to destroy them..."

The Gemara states a principle that if one prays for a fellow Jew to have his need fulfilled, which is identical to his own, Hashem will give priority to the need of the one who is praying on behalf of his fellow. Unfortunately, there are more Jews unaffiliated with Judaism than those who are; and those who are connected can always use an upgrade in their level of commitment. The question is - what do we do for our unaffiliated brethren and what do we do for ourselves to be able to advance our own Judaism? If a Jew truly understood who he is and what his heritage is, he would definitely become involved in Torah study and mitzvah observance. It is only because of a lack of Jewish education and understanding that Jews drift away. We must pray that our fellow Jew be given the

understanding and appreciation for our heritage.

The Mishnah in Tractate Sanhedrin tells us that whoever saves the life of a single Jew it is as if he had saved the entire world. Therefore, if one saves a Jew spiritually, the value is the equivalent to saving the entire world and it will impact upon his progeny until the end of time.

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