

THE WISER WE WILL BE

by Rabbi Label Lam

See, I have taught you statutes and ordinances, as HASHEM, my God, commanded me, to do in the midst of the land to which you are coming to possess. And you shall keep them and do them, for that is your wisdom and your understanding in the eyes of the nations, who will hear all these statutes and say, "Only this great nation is a wise and understanding people." For what great nation is there that has God so near to it, as HASHEM our God is at all times that we call upon Him? And which great nation is it that has just statutes and ordinances, as this entire Torah, which I set before you this day? (Devarim 4:5-8)

I'm still basking in the afterglow of the Daf HaYomi Siyum at (Giant) Gedolim Stadium and trying to hold on to the memory of being there and Davening with 100,000 brethren. It was awesome! I am haunted by the challenge of the verse in this week's portion, "Beware and watch yourself very well, lest you forget the things that your eyes saw, and lest these things depart from your heart, all the days of your life..." (Devarim 4:9) I could not help but notice, part jokingly and very seriously too that one of the emphatic themes of the evening was most lit up for all to see in the largest type there at "MET LIFE Stadium". "MET" is death in Hebrew and "LIFE" is life in English! As if to say, "I place before you today- life and death... and then HASHEM implores, "Choose LIFE!" A celebration of a grueling and complex 7 and ½ year learning cycle by working people with financial burdens and extra-large families is a great testimony of a desire for life. In a world where instant pleasures dominate and the size of the sound bites match the attention span of a fly, and still so many were able to endure, staying focused on a bigger and deeper daily purpose. What an accomplishment!

Rashi says on the verse: "For that is your wisdom and your understanding in the eyes of the nations"- "with this you will be considered wise and understanding to the eyes of the nations." This is in reference to the Torah and the study of Torah! That is truest indicator of our national IQ.

Rabbi Nota Schiller, the Dean of Ohr Somayach Jerusalem told about an episode when he was yet a Yeshiva student at Ner Yisrael in Baltimore. He had been attending night classes at John Hopkins University in pursuit of a degree. It was the first day of the semester and the professor was taking attendance, methodically reciting names and matching them with faces. Nearing the end of the alphabet, he called out, "Schiller!" Young Rabbi Schiller raised his hand declaring himself present. Noticing a Yarmulka planted firmly atop his head, the professor asked, "Are you a student of the Talmud?" To which Rabbi Schiller proudly acknowledged, "Yes!" The professor then asked rhetorically, "What are you doing here!?"

Rabbi Schiller admitted that he was more than a little taken aback. He had had his share of debates and disagreements with other professors and they had come to some philosophical loggerheads but this was the first day. He was just taking attendance and he did not even have an opportunity to challenge him on any point. He wondered why he was being singled out and picked on! Is this not a case of blatant anti-Semitism?! Without being prompted the professor explained himself as follows: "You realize of course this is a class on sociology and the Rabbis of the Talmud were the greatest sociologists. If they can hold a people together for thousands of years, in disparate lands, under the most difficult of circumstances, and without a central authority, and they should remain one people-one nation, then they must be the greatest sociologists of all time. Since you are a student of the Talmud, I am afraid I have nothing to teach you!" Rabbi Schiller reports breathing a sigh of relief and announcing, "Professor Waterman, I want to put your mind at ease. I had no intentions of learning anything. I only came here for the easy A."

The Talmud is the original blog. It has a selection of posts from the greatest and most reliable minds over many generations. The closer we can be in spiritual proximity to the notions of those noble minds then **the wiser we will be!** DvarTorah, Copyright © 2007 by Rabbi Label Lam and [Torah.org](https://torah.org).